

## A Review of Chapter 5, *Mexican American Heritage*

Dr. John Mckiernan-Gonzalez

Department of History

Texas State University

### **Highlights**

1. There are no Mexican Americans quoted in the chapter.
2. The only extended primary source quotes in the chapter on the U.S. are from Mark Twain (*Roughing It, 1872*), Alexis de Tocqueville (*Democracy in America, 1848*), and Abraham Lincoln (*The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863*).
3. The text does not mention any Mexican American women.
4. There are no women cited or quoted in the chapter.
5. The chapter on the U.S. features two Latinos: Antonio Coronel, a Californio landowner and gold miner, and Francisco Rosales, a Chilean gold miner who becomes a politician in Chile.
6. The chapter names three American Latinos, the two above and one whom may be imaginary, Francis Coronel.
7. The only peer-reviewed scholarship cited is a book published in China on Chinese laborers and the making of the railroad. It has little to do with the content of that particular section.
8. In a forty five page chapter, there are only two pages of content that relate directly to Mexican Americans.
9. The chapter on Mexico focuses on two presidents, Benito Juarez and Porfirio Diaz. The chapter mentions two other Mexicans by name in the chapter.
10. The chapter on Mexico spends 16 pages on the Spanish American war and Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson's foreign policy principles. Not sure how this is a diverging path.
11. Primary sourcing is suspect. The source for a Benito Juarez speech is 123helpme.com.
12. Given the general absence of Mexican American individuals and Mexican American religious, political, commercial, and cultural institutions in this chapter, it is difficult to understand what this has to do with 'Mexican American Heritage,' the title [and intended purpose] of the book.

### **General Observations.**

There is a level of ideological tendentiousness that affects the narrative, leading to distortions and digressions that have little to do with the general narrative for Mexican Americans.

The general narrative for Mexican Americans in the chapter is:

“By 1910, this energy could be seen in America’s thriving business and industrial economy, in the thousands of patents granted to individual developers, in cities that sprung up all over the West, and in the 50 million people who were farming. There were costs associated with this rapid development and expansion, especially for disadvantaged people groups, but by World War I (1914-1918), the United States had rocketed into the spotlight and was poised to become a key player in worldwide affairs. Within this context, the first several hundred thousand Latinos found a challenging but protective haven from tumultuous conditions at home.” (Angle and Riddle, 2016: 214)

The argument means to reflect developments in the broader United States. The text seems to indicate that the authors will show the mechanisms that made the United States a ‘challenging but protective haven from tumultuous conditions at home,’ without actually explaining why the United States was a haven, but not a home for Mexican Americans between 1850 and 1910.

### *Mining*

According to the authors, the political legacy of the Gold Rush in California lays directly in the 1872 Mining Act. That is, “the 1872 Mining Act codified proper protocol for developing mines and legalized squatters claims to the land they were excavating” (Angle and Riddle, 2016: 213). This is a touch confusing, because, as the sidenote makes clear, a squatter is someone living on land with no legal permission. Did the 1872 Mining Act lead to the clearing of squatters? Did the 1872 Mining Act legalize the theft of minerals from these properties held mostly by Mexican land grantees? Did the 1872 Mining Act give title to the ore being excavated to the miners excavating the ore, or to the owners of the claim? Do the authors’ imply that there was no law in the west [or, by implication, under Spain, Russia, or Mexico, let alone the nations who had title

to the land before these empires and nations lay claim to these lands west of Nacogdoches]. Do they mean to say that squatters had better claims to the minerals on lands owned by Mexican American landowners, because the squatters were not Mexican? This is a claim that merits more explanation.

Angle and Riddle seem to imply that giving squatters the license to own the land and the gold they pulled from land they illegally occupied is good policy. This may be because Californios owned this land, or Native American nations controlled this land. Their section on mining concludes that the United States brought law to a lawless region and stabilized mining in regions that had once been part of Mexico. This may be why this section of the chapter concludes that “the West was diverse, wild, and unmonitored, but immigrants, including many with Mexican heritage got to take advantage of Manifest Destiny and forge their own future... the West offered the chance to Latinos, Indians, black Americans, and indentured servants and immigrants from all over the world to better themselves... and the U.S. government aided this quest by creating laws that encouraged individuals to mine land themselves, purchase it, and keep the profits. This was unique in the history of the world.” (Angle and Riddle, 2016: 216-7).

This conclusion regarding the importance of U.S. mining laws, of course, makes little connection to the actual situation of Mexican Americans and many others – like Chinese miners, California based Native Americans, and African Americans – that white Americans considered foreign or threatening to the body politic. The appeal to the importance of low taxation and minimal regulation has very little to do with the actual experiences of Mexican landowners, miners, ranchers, or migrant workers in California between 1850 and 1910.

The authors do point out that ‘the foreign miners’ tax’ led “Mexicans, Chileans, and above all, the Chinese,” to leave mining in California. The text skips over the immigrants from Europe who did not suffer the effects of the miners’ tax. They do point out that “kitchens, taverns, and brothels cropped up,” giving opportunities to “Indians, who served as porters, the Chinese, who became cooks and laundrymen, and Irish and Germans, who produced cheese, bread and alcohol.” (213) This statement invokes stereotypes of these three communities; the section ignores the violence against Chinese workers and native communities (particularly, the state-

supported decimations of California Indians). Given that these are unsupported yet controversial statements, students will be left with little to discuss who did the work in gold mines, and who accrued the profits of mining, and why this happened (Pitti, 2007).

### *Slavery*

I welcome the introduction of slavery as a discussion for Mexican American heritage. People captured, sold and bought other people across the Americas, and it took centuries to fight this system of exploitation. Thinking about slavery in the American West, or in once Mexican regions, provides an opportunity to consider situations where people enslaved people who looked and – at times – talked like themselves. In particular, it might help students revisit the question of chattel slavery, to think about why United States society made slavery a racial status that followed from the mothers’ status as someone’s property, and why other societies developed (and outlawed or accommodated to) other kinds of slavery.

This did not happen in *Mexican American Heritage*. There was little discussion of the Mexican citizens enslaved because they were black after 1848. More important, the text ignored broad ways in which slavery shaped legal systems after the abolition of slavery across the United States. Instead, the textbook called slavery “a moral error” (210). They claimed that in order to encourage settlement on Indian land, passed land acts that mandated surveying, the construction of public schools and government buildings, and the defense of civil liberties. These land acts “even prohibited slavery, showing the Founding fathers’ commitment to abolition.” (217). The authors claim the Civil War was fought over States’ Rights, not the federal right to protect property in others that slave-owners claimed over black bodies across the United States after *Dred Scott*. There was little discussion of debt-peonage, of various vagrancy acts across the American West, and the military campaign against slavery among the Comanche and their New Mexican and Texas neighbors. This is unfortunate, because far too often, Mexican Americans are considered to be outside the borders of the slavery debate in the United States, even though like many other minority communities in the United States, they are descended from slaves and slave-owners.

### *Passive Voice and Politics*

Angle and Riddle do point that Mexican Americans served as elected officials and public officers. They mar this point by the use of passive voice. They point out that “Mexican Americans were selected to fill these positions [in the government bureaucracy],” without pointing out who selected them, and why. It would be useful to point out the relatively large presence of Mexican Americans as soldiers and federal employees in territorial New Mexico and Arizona, two places where Mexican Americans vastly outnumbered white Southern and Midwestern migrants and thus, might be eligible to exercise political authority. It might also be useful to point out that Mexican American voters, in coalition with some other ethnic communities, elected Mexican American representatives, perhaps because they agreed with their politics. It would also be useful to point out that the “three Mexican Mayors... in Los Angeles in the 1850s and 1860s” lost their lands in legal battles with squatters in the 1870s and 80s, two of whom ended up landless and bankrupt. Moreover, voters elected Mexican American candidates to office in places where Mexican Americans were the majority of the electorate; the point isn’t that Americans thought differently about Latinos then; the point – if you follow the voting rolls for San Antonio, Santa Barbara, San Francisco, and El Paso – is that other Americans tended not to vote for Mexican American candidates, and did their best to ensure that Mexican Americans not vote. If Angle and Riddle had included specific names, places, and emphasized that Mexican Americans voted when authorities defended their right to vote, this section might provide a useful discussion of the kinds of candidates and the kinds of voting in Mexican American communities.

### *Industrialization and Immigration*

This was a spirited discussion of barbed wire, of public support of railroads, newlands, and private enterprise, of the ways engineering innovations transformed the American landscape. The authors pointed out that cowboys were multi-ethnic and industrial, and used Nat Love as the example. They tied George Washington Carver’s commitment to invention to his sense of mission in the American South. They did tie the rise in cross-border movement between the United States, Europe, Asia, and Mexico to the growth of American industry.

This generous depiction of industry did not extend to a discussion of industrial workers. They did not mention the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Instead, they claimed “Chinese flooded the shores of California.” (239) They did not discuss the active ways U.S. farmers and miners claimed native lands, breaking treaty after recently broken treaty to lay claims on productive river lands, ore-bearing hills, and trade routes between the Pacific and the Midwest. This was development, without developers. Instead, the authors claimed that “The price of industrial and economic modernization was the loss of the American Indian, as the typical Indian lifestyle was eclipsed by one that had no room for collective lands, sacred rites, and premodern ideals.” (239) This ignores the sacred rites and premodern ideals that shape Christianity; this also ignores the history of collective lands in U.S. legal traditions. Although states could enfranchise individual native Americans, it took till 1924 for Congress to pass a law recognizing a federal right of citizenship for Native Americans. Rather than discussing the legal acts and institutional support that justified the murder and dispossessions of native communities (like the Vagrancy Act in California), the authors claim it was a different lifestyle that led to the decimation of native communities. This is an unfortunate exclusion, particularly in a section that does not emphasize the labor contributions – and land dispossession - of Mexican communities.

Regarding immigration, the authors did not mention that there were no national quotas on migration, at least until 1922. They did not include the active attempts by states in the South, the Midwest, and the Far West to encourage migration and settlement in their states. Even though the United States is a country of immigrants, indigenous peoples, and enslaved peoples, the authors chose not to discuss the active embrace of migration and open border policy by most polities in the United States.

### *The Chapter on Mexico*

The chapter focuses on two key politicians in Mexico, the idealistic Benito Juarez and the dictatorial Porfirio Diaz. There is a discussion of the civil wars in Mexico after independence, but there is little to explain what conditions and communities drove this ongoing conflict over the role of federal authority in politically and ethnically diverse Mexico. Moreover, given that this is a textbook on Mexican American Heritage, there is little explanation why these two presidents are important to our understanding of Mexican American heritage. Rather, the authors seek to draw the largest possible contrasts between Mexico and the United States.

That said, there is some discussion of support and campaigning in the U.S. against Napoleon's emissaries and imposed monarchy in Mexico. There is a discussion of the ways Benito Juarez sought to strengthen both presidential and federal authority, both through the privatization of church land and the establishment of a presidential veto over Congress. They point out that already wealthy landowners benefitted the most from the disentanglement of church land, and that Porfirio Diaz.

### *Anticlericalism in Mexico*

I appreciate the discussion of anticlericalism, as it does challenge the church-ridden stereotype of Mexican families. However, this is the only discussion of religion in Mexico and religion in the United States. Having this kind of anticlericalism marked off might indicate that Mexico is a particularly anti-Christian space.

### *Labor Conflict in Mexico*

The authors call it *ethnic hostility*. They provide a full sidebar to discuss the ways (white) American mine managers and railroad supervisors resented drinking, resistance, and absenteeism among their (Mexican) employees. Although the same could be said about workers in the United States as well as managers of commercial enterprises, Riddle and Angle prefer to write that "Mexican laborers were not reared to put in a full day's work so rigorously. There was a cultural

attitude of *mañana* or tomorrow, when it came to high gear production.” (248). The sidebar is a little strange, unless the authors are making an argument about labor conflicts (and potentially civil rights organizing) being an example of ethnic tension.

### *Literacy in Mexico*

The chapter concludes that under Porfirio Diaz, the majority of Mexicans were poor, illiterate, and undereducated. Given that the Porfiriato oversaw some of the largest growths in literacy rates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this seems like a broad and difficult generalization. More troubling is that the authors couple this incomplete literacy to the racial status of the majority of Mexicans: “In addition, Indian and Mestizo peasants – the majority of the Mexican population – remained poor and disenfranchised... while most of the industrial profit was taken out of the country because the work was done by foreigners.” (249-50). This implicitly claims that the majority of Mexico was poor because they were lazy (Indians and mestizos). This is unfortunate, given the abundant reasons both Riddle and Angle give for the difficult conditions campesinos faced in Mexico between 1850 and 1910.

### **Key Omissions in the chapter on Mexican Americans and the United States, 1850-1910**

*The text ignores key contributions in Mexican American and American West Historiography*

1. *Changes in the relative place of Mexican Americans in a multi-ethnic racial order in the American West.*

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo sets up a legal paradox: In exchange for establishing an agreed upon border between Mexico and the United States, the United States promises to treat Mexican citizens in the United States like they were American citizens. But, did this happen? Did Mexicans become part of the U.S. body politic? Can people be legally citizens and socially foreign? The following authors explore changes in the relative place of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States between 1850 and 1910.

Unfortunately, none of these authors are present.



Ian Haney Lopez,  
Natalia Molina,  
Laura Gomez,  
Karl Jacoby,  
David Montejano,  
Susan Johnson,  
Sarah Deutsch,  
Antonia Castañeda,  
John Nieto-Phillips,  
Leonard Pitt,  
Raul Ramos  
Omar Valerio-Jimenez  
Stephen Pitti

For a more comprehensive bibliography regarding Latinos and Mexican Americans in the making of the United States, please consult the bibliography compiled by the Organization of American Historians and the National Park Service in the Latino Theme Study:

[https://www.nps.gov/heritageinitiatives/latino/latinothemestudy/pdfs/Bibliography\\_web\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/heritageinitiatives/latino/latinothemestudy/pdfs/Bibliography_web_Final.pdf)

2. *The high levels of collective violence against Mexican Americans, Chinese Migrants, African Americans and, most importantly, Native Americans.*

According to William Carrigan and Clive Webb, the period between 1848 and 1910 marked the highest level of violent and murderous animosity toward people connected to Mexican communities in the United States. In their monograph, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexican Americans*, they provide an inventory of lynching against Mexicans. Although the numbers pale with the carnage in the U.S. civil war and the decimation of native communities west of the Mississippi between 1850 and 1910, it is worth noting that Americans lynched African Americans, Native Americans and Latinos.

This is a Mexican American Heritage that we forget at our peril.

The Dawes Act marked the nadir for Native American communities across the United States. The Gilded Age is the period in the history of the United States that had the lowest number of people, and – after the slave raids and virgin soil epidemics that accompanied sixteenth century waves of conquest - the sharpest decline in the number of native people. Scholars working on nineteenth century Native American have tracked the organized, popular, and collective ways the United States attacked and/or undercut living conditions for indigenous communities. Scholars from Ned Blackhawk to Karl Jacoby and Andres Resendez have explored the particularly violent second half; none of this scholarship appears in the chapter.

3. *Women. There are none.*

## **Conclusion**

This book does not meet a minimal bar to call this a Mexican American Heritage textbook.

The level of attention to Mexican Americans parallels mainstream U.S. history textbooks, except for the ideological tendentiousness around the importance of free markets and private property in the text. In other words, this book has more to do with general treatments of U.S. history and almost nothing to do with Mexican American history.

I completed a short survey of chapters on Reconstruction and the American West in four different United States history textbooks. None of the textbooks I reviewed quoted a Mexican American person, some named one or two Mexican Americans, and some devoted a paragraph or two to the general condition of Mexican Americans in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. James Henrette, David Brody, Lynn Dumenil's, *America, a Concise History's* includes legal testimony by Harriet Hernandez, a black woman in Reconstruction Louisiana as well as excerpts from a diary by Ida Lindgren, a Swedish immigrant settling on the Minnesota prairie. There is a vivid description of the situations facing Mexican Americans, but there are no

names and no quotes. Alan Brinkley, the author of *An Unfinished Nation*, mentions Juan [Nepomuceno] Cortina. Unfortunately, much of Juan Cortina's political and financial career is in northern Mexico. Brinkley mentions a shopkeeping family in southern Arizona, as well as the situation facing women, Mexican American involvement in the populist party, a variety of social and political institutions, and the Virgin of Guadalupe (527). James Roark, Michael Johnson, and Patricia Cline Cohen's *Understanding the American Promise* devotes two paragraphs in this chapter and discusses the *Mano Negras*, a group that sounds suspiciously like the *Gorras Blancas*, but is new to me. There are no individuals and, obviously, no one reflecting on their particular situation. These eight historians did not find ways to include a quote or statement by a Mexican American individual that reflected the broad patterns of American history between 1850 and 1900.

I decided to see whether broad surveys of Mexican American history met the minimal bar I set for *Mexican American Heritage*: individuals, quotes, and hopefully some women with quotes. I only reviewed the chapters that covered the time period between 1850 and 1900. The four texts included Neil Foley's *Mexicans in the Making of the United States* (Harvard, 2011); Michael Gonzales's *Mexicanos: a history of Mexicans in the United States* (Indiana, 2007); Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: a History of Mexican Americans from the Colonial Era to the Present* (Oxford, 2010); and Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: a History of Chicanos* (Pearson, 2010). Much to my surprise, only one text included a woman's statement: Josefa Loaiza declaring to a mob gathered outside of her house in California, "This is no place to call me bad names, come into my house and call me that." (Acuña, 2010: 116). *Mexicans in the Making of the United States* danced with the density of quotes in the narrative. That said, all four shared vivid quotes, statements, and situations that would prompt lively conversations among students and other scholars. The scholars included men and women with different social and political positions in American society. The only text that did not include quotes by nineteenth century contemporaries was Michael Gonzales's *Mexicanos*, who used current scholars' words to tell us what Mexican Americans felt in the nineteenth century. The surveys met and surpassed the bar I set, pointing to broad trends in 19<sup>th</sup> century American society, as well as geographic and political factors complicating their broad analysis of Mexican American communities in the

nineteenth century United States.

I would hate to be a Mexican American student seeking my place in the United States, and be confronted with the idea that Mexican Americans had nothing to say about their situation, nothing to say about slavery, and nothing to say about industrialization. And to have a textbook titled *Mexican American Heritage* justify this claim. This is almost worse than no textbook.

For the record, most U.S. history textbooks I use never mention anyone other than Cesar Chavez or Dolores Huerta, and maybe include their words. This is deeply frustrating for me as a U.S. history specialist.