Internal Colonialism Thesis

Perspective of Mexican American Historians on the Experience of the Mexican People in the United States, 1848-1900
Is your cell phone on?

Shakira asks you to “Please! Turn it off!”
Central Analytical Questions

• What were the experiences of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the American Southwest following the Conquest of 1848?
• How successful were Anglo-Americans in the attempt to impose a monolingual society on the Mexican Americans?
• How has a public/private identity for Mexicans evolved historically?
More Than 500,000 Rally in L.A. for Immigrants' Rights, Los Angeles Times, March 25, 2006
Immigration Pop Quiz

1. What is the estimated number of illegal immigrants in the United States?
   A. 800,000
   B. 1.4 million
   C. 5.6 million
   D. More than 10 million

2. Rank countries from which immigrants have come to the United States illegally, from most to least.
   A. Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador
   B. El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico
   C. Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia
   D. Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador

3. Which of the following states experienced the greatest percentage increase of illegal immigrants from 1990 to 2000?
   A. Georgia
   B. North Carolina
   C. Colorado

4. True or false: The United States' 11.5% immigrant population is the highest in this country's history.
   A. True
   B. False
La Frontera, 1848

As a result of the Mexican American War, Mexicans became “foreigners in their native land” as the Mexican Northwest was transformed into the American Southwest.
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848

A Harsh Treaty

Mexico loses 50% of its land

US paid $15M

US guarantees Mexicans in US citizenship rights to property, civil rights, and freedom of religion

Natives virtually ignored
Principal Cultural Boundaries of the United States

Note this map is Both historical and Contemporary

Note main “Hispanic” areas

Why isn’t this a first order cultural boundary?

What themes apply here?

Authors of Mexican American Historiography

- “Chicano” Scholars
  - Ideologically oriented
  - Record past
  - Instill Ethnic Pride
  - Focus on Heroes
  - Disprove myths (docility)
  - Condemn Sellouts
- Mainstream Scholars
  - Charge bias
- Search for Objectivity

Rudolfo “Rudy” Acuna

Juan Gomez-Quinones
Key Works in the Internal Colonialism Historiography

Internal Colonialism Thesis

• Definition: One people takeover another areas people and resources and exploit them, while they dictate or determine the areas future economic, social, cultural, and political direction

• Central Analytical Question?
  - Did the U.S. live up to the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and guarantee Mexican-American citizens equal rights and protections?
Scholar’s Points of View:

- Acuna: The U.S. had “a singularly poor record” in which the US government and citizens violated every promise of equality.

- Gomez: Rights were “not generally respected,” but subordination was uneven and conditioned by social class status of population.

- Gutierrez: “[T]he ethnic Mexican population of the region was slowly but surely relegated to an inferior, caste-like statues in the region’s evolving social system.”

Critical Thinking Question: what kind of analysis is this?
Key Areas of Analysis

• Demographic Takeover
• Culture
• Political Status
• Land Rights
• Education
• Economic Takeover
• Role of Gender
Demographics

What happened to Mexican Populations throughout region?

- **California**
  - Quickly surpassed in Northern California
  - More slowly surpassed in Southern California, except Los Angeles

- **New Mexico**
  - Mexican majority in Santa Fe region
  - Slowly surpassed in Albuquerque region

- **Arizona**
  - Mexican majority in Southern Arizona
  - Slowly surpassed in Central and Northern Arizona
Demographics

• What happened to Mexican Populations throughout region?
  - Texas
    • Surpassed in Mexican Era in Eastern Texas
    • Mexican majority in South Texas
  - Colorado
    • Mexican majority in Southern Colorado
    • Anglo majority in Central Colorado
Demographics and Immigration

Context: a porous border

- Estimates* of migration,
  - 1848–1900: 50,000
  - 1848–1890s: 1,000 per year, 1890s (50% increase)
- A distinct Mexican group, the Nortenos, who celebrate Cinco De Mayo and Septembre de 16
- Class differences:
  - Large land-owning Mexican Elite in New Mexico and California and South Texas
  - Small property owners
  - Sellers of labor

*Estimates because we are in the virtual dark about pre–1908 migration
Because Mexicans weren’t counted as immigrants. Why not?
Intercultural Contact

• Generated a struggle against the cultural dominance of Anglo laws, administration, language, and values in distinct venues

• Education
  ▪ Anglos bring public education and civic stability
    • Anglos dominate orientation, staffing, and curriculum
    • Classroom becomes a battleground over culture producing high dropout (blowout?) rates
    • Mexicans defend bilingual education in public schools
  ▪ Mexicans preferred parochial schools
    • Mexicans sought public financing of parochial schools
    • In absence of parochial schools, Mexican women establish escuelitas
Symbolic Politics: Where is the State Capitol Located?

- California - Sacramento
- New Mexico - Albuquerque
- Texas - Austin
- Colorado - Denver
- Arizona - Phoenix

What does the location of the capitol explain?
Political Status

• Political Status: Do Mexicans exercise political capacities to organize political mobilization and leadership?
  ▪ California
  ▪ New Mexico
  ▪ Texas
  ▪ Colorado
  ▪ Arizona
Land Rights

• Did Anglos fairly test titles to land grants?
  ▪ California
    • Northern
    • Southern
  ▪ New Mexico
  ▪ Texas
  ▪ Typical Process of Land Transfer
  ▪ Effected Population
Two Different Systems of Land Titles

- **Spanish/Mexican Titles** – informal, less rigid lines, & often written in terms as, “my land is from this tree, to the lake, to the big oak, to the bluff,” i.e.

- **American Land Titles** – formal, strict lines, legally surveyed by accepted professionals in Anglo circles
A Casual Attitude toward Land

Sketch map or diseño of Rancho Providencia, now part of Burbank, California. 1840
Sketch map or diseño of Rancho Providencia, now part of Burbank, California. 1840
Did Anglos fairly test titles to land grants?

- Summary of Evidence on California:
  - Gwin Commission after Senator William Gwin, established 3 man commission to evaluate Land Grants, finds for Mexicans on 9 of 12 M acres (75%)
  - A quick takeover of land in Northern California (one exception: family of Mariano Vallejo in Sonoma)
  - A slow decline in Southern California until drought of 1864 and subsequent depression
Land Rights

• Did Anglos fairly test titles to land grants?
  ▪ Summary of Evidence on Texas:
    • Census Analysis
      ▪ 1850, property in Texas had been evenly divided between Mexicans and Anglos: Tejanos comprised 32.4% of workers in state and owned 33% of wealth of state
      ▪ 1860 Census shows in Rio Grande Valley, where Mexicans are concentrated, 57 of 263 large land owners, only two are Mexican
      ▪ 1870 Census, Tejanos were 47.6% of workforce and owned 10.6% of wealth
Did Anglos fairly test titles to land grants?

- Summary of Evidence on Texas:
  - Role of Gender
    - Land transfers occurred by sale and marriage
      - Between 1836–1842, 13 Anglos acquired 13M acres in legal sales from 358 Mexican landowners
      - After 1848, land transferred as a result of marriage of Mexican women to Anglo men
      - John Young married Solome Balli, of a prominent Mexican land grant family; when he died she married his clerk, John McAllen. By 1890, he owned 160k acres
      - H. L. Kinney married Petra Vela de Vidal and acquired “La Para” Ranch (325k acres). By 1855, ranch is 500k acres
Land Rights

- Did Anglos fairly test titles to land grants?
  - Summary of Evidence on New Mexico:
    - Land Commission and unscrupulous “Sante Fe Ring” of real estate operators and lawyers behave less evenhandedly
      - 35 million acres of land are challenged
      - Mexicans retained 2 million acres
Los Angeles Case Study, 1850–1880

- What language is instruction taught in?
  - Spanish 1848–1853
  - English 1855—Mexicans create private schools
  - Anglos defeat petition to create bilingual schools

- What were the rates of student success?
  - Mexicans have a lower rate of school attendance

- What were rates of illiteracy?
  - Mexicans have 25% literacy rate compared to 88% Anglo literacy rate
Gender and Colonialism

• Experience of women
  - In Los Angeles Anglo men offered opportunities for women to practice exogamy (marrying outside of group)
    • Before 1860, 1 in 10 Mexican women marry Anglos
    • After 1860, interethnic marriages were common 1 in 3 Mexican women marry Anglos
  - Mexican girls begin attending public schools 1856
  - This suggests hostility wasn’t uniform
    • Anglo American stereotyping of Mexican males and females show males denigrated but females put on a pedestal
Anglo Economic Takeover

- Similarities and Differences with Native-Americans
  - Both Natives and Mexicans lost land
  - But Natives were herded onto reservations
  - Mexicans were incorporated into the new economy of the Southwest

- Massive Anglo Capital Investment in the Southwest
  - Farming, Cattle Raising, Railroads, Timber, Mining
  - Replaces Mexican and Indian subsistence economies
Anglo Economic Takeover

- West turned into an **extractive** economy
  - 40-60% of all workers
  - Compare to only 33% elsewhere
  - Very high percentage of service workers in transportation
  - New market economy driven by massive corporations
    - 3 million acre ranches
    - Giant Mining Corporations like Phelps-Dodge and Anaconda Copper
- Mexican labor dominated these labor markets
  - Make major contributions to economic success of region
  - Mexicans were **included** in the regional economic transformation
  - Why are Natives marginalized and Mexicans included?
Late 19th Century Patterns of Land Usage
Anglo Economic Takeover

- Mexicans had experience in farming, ranching, and mining; Natives lack experience in these areas
- Mexicans lived in fertile river valleys in sufficient numbers to constitute a readily available labor pool; Natives were scattered and less accessible
- Mexican laborers didn’t die from contact with Anglos; Natives still experienced epidemics
- Mexican labor was easier to organize into work gangs because of their padrone-peon system
- Absence of African Americans or Asians as competitors in Southwest
Mexican Mineros

- Large-scale mining began to develop in Arizona and New Mexico in the late 19th century.
- In this unidentified photograph from the 1890s, the men are wearing traditional clothing, indicating perhaps that they are recent arrivals at the mine.
The Cattle Drive Crew

- Wrangler
- Remuda
- Chuck Wagon
- Trail Boss
- Point
- Swing
- Flank
- Drag
Apricot Workers, 1938

Mexican immigrant women had the double burden of working while trying to maintain their families in harsh, substandard living conditions.

They clustered in jobs packing fruits and vegetables.

Lange captured a view of the packing shed that emphasized unpleasant working conditions and showed the women and a handful of men hard at work.

For this photograph Lange focused on the women themselves. Why? What was Lange attempting to capture? What does the image suggest about the way in which these women created a communal spirit despite the arduous nature of fruit packing work?

Photo by Dorothea Lange, Brentwood, Ca, 1938
A glutted labor market and the presence of poor Mexican women in the West and Southwest led garment manufacturers to return to the late 19th century practice of putting out piecework to women in their homes.

This picture shows Mexican American women in Texas working on fabric cut in New York City and sent to them in bundles.

The three women are gathered in a home, the positions of the women and bundles of cloth indicate the women are engaged in commercial sewing.

The man's hat hanging on the wall suggests there might be a male breadwinner but women's paid labor is still necessary.
Exploitation or Opportunity?

**Exploitation**
- Mexicans experience a two-tier wage system (or dual labor market)
  - In Mining, Mexican copper mineros receive 50 to 70% less in wages than white miners ($2 to $2.25 per day compared to $4 per day)
  - On railroads, Mexicans earn $1–2 a day

**Opportunity**
- Wages Mexicans receive are high wages to them
  - In Mexican interior, earn 23 cents a day
  - In Juarez earn 88 cents a day
  - On Haciendas earn 12 cents a day
Mexicans and Mexican American Identities

- The one ethnic group whose identity is defined by a (porous) US-Mexican border
  - A two thousand mile border (La Frontera)
  - Mexicans occupy both sides of the boundary
  - Movement across La Frontera was frequent
  - “Pocho,” an intra-group term defined by a boundary
    - An uprooted Mexican
  - How did Anglo Americans view them?
Under What Circumstances do Mexican Americans Emphasize Mexican or American Identities?

- **Mexican**
  - When emphasizing art, music, food, heritage, and language
  - When emphasizing religion
  - When under cultural attack
  - When in a crowd of Anglos
  - When there are familial binds that tie

- **American**
  - When asserting rights
  - When asserting accomplishments
  - When seeking advantages
  - When they share the same expectations as other Americans
  - When in a crowd of Mexicans
  - When there is a war
  - When opportunities arise

In each case the public/private identity is shaped by context.
Does Internal Colonialism teach hatred?

- State of Arizona ban on Mexican American Studies, 2010
  - Supt. John Huppenthal investigation
  - Board of Trustees ban program
  - Rudy Acuna’s *Occupied America* banned

Hispanic High School Students protest ban, Tucson, Arizona, 2012
Critical Thinking Exercise?

• Have Mexican American scholars transformed our understanding of the history of the American southwest?
• Do Internal Colonialism scholars teach hatred as claimed by some critics?
• Are there other ways of framing the Mexican experience during this period?
Does the internal colonialism thesis apply to the Mexican American experience in the 20th century and beyond?