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Culture, Identity, and Community: Musings on Chicano Historiography at the End of the Millennium*

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The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.

—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”¹

As we reach the end of the millennium the future seems bleak for people of color, especially Chicanos and Latinos. Indeed we are in a “state of emergency.” The recent passage of Propositions 187 and 209 in California are part of a larger vision which has turned ethnic Mexicans into the signifiers of the crisis of American society.²

This attack has once again made clear the importance of Chi-

*Special thanks to Jeff Rangel, Emma Pérez and Michael Miller Topp for reading and critiquing early versions of this piece.

1. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. by Harry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

2. This is David Gutiérrez’s notion which includes both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

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cano identity as a counterhegemonic tool in an antiracist crusade. Scholars have responded to these reactionary times, producing new scholarship that seeks to understand the historical roots of the complex and nuanced circumstances of the ethnic Mexican community in California. Thus, this attempt to disenfranchise ethnic Mexicans has in many ways backfired and Chicano academics have met the challenge head on with the only ammunition that they have at their disposal—ideas. The authors whose books are under review are writing in the tradition of Chicano historians—being public intellectuals and using their scholarly work to counter the mainstream assumptions of the academy and answering historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones's 1977 call "to debate on culture."³ The books under review all share a common thread—they explore the construction of Chicano culture and identity. These studies constitute a confrontation of the current political situation, of which George Lipsitz tells us, "Questions of culture are questions of politics."⁴ In essence, they show the influence of the early practitioners of Chicano history, like Gómez-Quiñones and Albert Camarillo.⁵

Yet in answering that call these scholars have gone beyond the seemingly essentialized notions of identity and culture that Gómez-Quiñones formulated and have sought a paradigm that recognizes that identity and culture are social constructs.⁶ For this they have turned to British black cultural studies scholars who attempt to problematize identity's construction, most notably Stuart Hall. This connection between cultural studies and Chicano studies is a logical one that Lipsitz, among others, has noted. Like Lipsitz, I believe that the convergence of these two apparently disparate disciplines makes sense when both fields are explored. Both grew out of political circumstances. For Chicano studies, the impetus came from Chicano/a scholars' attempt to rewrite the dominant narratives that had subjugated Mexican Americans in the past. The Chicano movement provided the conditions to create a "new space to describe ourselves."⁷ However, in this view, Chicano identity was oftentimes

3. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "On Culture," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 5, 2. (Spring 1977): 3.

4. George Lipsitz, "Con Safos: Can Cultural Studies Read the Writing on the Wall?" Unpublished Paper. (January 1991), 4.

5. Indeed, Albert Camarillo, who worked under Norris Hundley and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, directed George Sánchez's and David Gutiérrez's doctoral dissertations and served on Lisbeth Haas and Tomás Almaguer's doctoral committees.

6. I say "seemingly" because if one reads Gómez-Quiñones carefully, it is evident that he has a fluid notion of culture. His static view represents his subject position as a "strategic essentialist."

7. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram, "Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses," *Cultural Studies* 4, 3. (October 1990): 205.

looked upon as static, fixed, and one-dimensional. Though the field had problems, let us not forget that from its beginnings, Chicano history looked upon identity and culture as important areas to be explored.

Cultural studies, on the other hand, grew out of the political conditions of Great Britain. Though the literary critic Raymond Williams, in a celebrated essay in the late 1950s, pronounced that "culture is ordinary"⁸. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that scholars of color gained a stronghold in the British academy and collectively encompassed black cultural studies. The reason for this rethinking of class and race in Britain was that the Thatcher/Reagan era was, as cultural critic Kobena Mercer argues, "marked [by] deepening social inequalities and the resurgence of racism on both sides of the Atlantic, [and] by neoconservative triumphalism that sent the Left spinning into an identity crisis."⁹ Mercer also cites other global forces of dislocation such as the Tiananmen Square incident, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War as reasons for the field's emergence. These incidents, along with insurgent Islamic fundamentalism, the Gulf War, and "the savage ethnic neonationalisms of Eastern Europe have reconfigured Britain as a local, even parochial, site in which questions of race, nation, and ethnicity have brought us to the point where . . . [creating] new identities—is slowly being recognized as the democratic task at hand."¹⁰

The marginal status that black British scholars felt, and continue to feel today, parallels what past and contemporary Chicano studies scholars have experienced. In short, both share a (post)-colonial experience. It is within this context that one can understand why Lipsitz believes that "strong affinities connect the two fields and suggest ample grounds for mutually beneficial dialogue. Cultural Studies methods may provide Chicana/o scholars with theories capable of doing justice to the many ambiguities, nuances, and contradictions of the Chicana/o experience."¹¹ Indeed, as the books under review show, the convergence of the two fields has proved fertile and has engendered new ways to ask and answer the question of how Mexican American identity is formed. All the authors trace this development in some way or another and look for it by either examining white supremacy, the use of space, the con-

8. Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," originally published in *Convictions*, ed. N. McKenzie, (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958) and reprinted in R. Williams, *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989).

9. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

10. Ibid.

11. Lipsitz, "Con Safos," 3.

struction of community, or the influx of Mexican immigration. Ultimately, all fulfill the promise of Chicano history and answer Gómez-Quíñones's call.

In *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, Tomás Almaguer enters the debate on culture by probing the socio-historical factors leading to the formation of the emergence of Mexican American identity. Almaguer's book represents the last installment of his quest to understand the unique subject position of the nineteenth-century ethnic Mexican community in California. As such it shows Almaguer's intellectual development from a key proponent of the internal colonial model¹² to his refutation of that theory and his advocacy of a more complex vision of the experiences of the ethnic Mexican community in the nineteenth century. *Racial Faultlines* builds on the outline that Almaguer provided in "Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography: The Colonial Model and Chicano Interpretation"¹³ and convincingly argues for a multidimensional view of the ethnic Mexican community and of racial and ethnic groups in general. He is concerned with how the conquest of western America "forged a new pattern of racialized relationships between conquerors, conquered, and the numerous immigrants that settled in the newly acquired territory" (p. 1). The case of California, Almaguer argues, disproves simplistic pronouncements that (1) view race as a binary and bipolar relationship, (2) see race and class hierarchies as neatly corresponding or symmetrical, and (3) believe that "racializing discourses and practices" are derivatives of and obscure a larger structural class relationship between capital and labor (p. 2).

With this in mind, Almaguer follows the lead of sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant as he traces the broad outlines of racial formation—"the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings"—in California during the second half of the nineteenth century (pp. 2–3). Omi and Winant use the term "racialization to specify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (p. 3). For these scholars, as for Almaguer, racialization is an ideological and historic process. Almaguer's vision in this regard is also informed by Stuart Hall's observa-

12. Tomás Almaguer, "Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism," *Aztlán* 2. (Spring 1971): 137–42.

13. Tomás Almaguer, "Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography: The Colonial Model and Chicano Interpretation," *Aztlán* 18. (Spring 1987): 7–28.

tion of the importance of ideas in “structuring hierarchical relations of group inequality” (p. 3). Thus, “questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—[play] a formative, not merely expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life” (p. 8).

With this foundation in place, Almaguer argues that the class interests of whites and the racial ideologies to which they subscribe work together to maintain their privileged positions and, in turn, to disenfranchise California’s racial groups: Mexicans, Native Americans, and Asian immigrants. Yet this racialization process was not the same for all. Instead, it varied according to historical views of the various groups. A stark contrast existed between the view of the California Indians, who were relegated to occupy the margins of Euro-American society, and the Mexican population which was integrated into the new society. Though treated differently, a good deal of the Mexican population were dark-complexioned mestizos, the descendants of Indians. Almaguer argues that the reason for the differences in treatment is based on the “different social evaluations that European Americans made of the racial status of these two cultural groups” (p. 4). This variance was rooted in history; it stemmed from the Spanish colonization of the Southwest during which Mexicans had been conferred a white racial status based on their “Christian ancestry, a romance language, European somatic features, and a formidable ruling elite that contested Yankee depredations” (p. 4). These traits ensured that European-American immigrants would treat the “half-civilized” Mexicans better than other racialized non-European immigrants. In fact, Mexicans, especially the Californio elite, were deemed worthy of integration and assimilation into the new social order. Here lies the crux of Almaguer’s book and the reason for its title: when it came to the various racial and ethnic groups that existed in California, the racialization process was not uniform and therefore “racial faultlines” developed among the groups.

Almaguer develops his argument through six historical-sociological essays that probe the major traits of the Mexican, Native American, and Asian immigrant experiences. He divides the book into three parts: the first deals with Mexican Americans, part two focuses on the nineteenth-century experience of the California Indians, and the last section analyzes the “racialized class conflict between European American working class and Chinese and Japanese immigrants in nineteenth century California” (p. 16). In the body of the book, Almaguer firmly makes his case that the racialization process was not monolithic, it varied from group to group while

holding some common elements and is contingent upon the unique histories of each racialized group. He also demonstrates how racial formation in California was tangled with the class interests of elite whites in order to subjugate racial groups and in turn maintain the privileged position of European Americans—both elites and the working class.

In comparing the three groups, what emerges is the special place of upper-class Mexicans in the racial hierarchy of California as a result of being classified white. The foremost reason for this classification was that Californio elites held political clout in the state at the time of the American conquest. This power stemmed from their ownership of vast amount of lands maintained to raise cattle for the hide and tallow industry. Upper-class Mexicans resisted European encroachment and consequently protected themselves from the intense racial animosity and discrimination that Anglos inflicted on other groups during the same period. Along with this resistance to conquest, Mexicans were also granted citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—which gave them an advantage over other racial groups but empowered them only momentarily. This *gente de razón* (and not the Mexican working class) also had another advantage over other racial groups: the ability to assimilate through their marriage with prominent Anglo immigrants. However, these families did not escape the ravages of the 1851 federal land law which made doubtful the rancheros' land claims and eventually led to the loss of these properties by a quarter of the elite population. The remaining three-fourths of the ranchero elite were severely weakened by the long and costly process of maintaining possession to their land. Californios also lost land through outright sale, unlawful squatting on their land, bankruptcy proceedings, and personal indebtedness brought on by vices and delinquent property taxes.

Yet, as Almaguer shows, the ethnic Mexican community was not monolithic and its working class contingent did not have the same privileges—nor losses—as its elite brethren. A fissure existed between the two groups. The Mexican working class—though technically eligible for citizenship rights—was for the most part not granted these entitlements by Anglos. Members of this group were treated no better than other racialized groups in the state and affected by racially discriminatory legislation such as the 1850 Foreign Miners Tax Law, which required a twenty-dollar mining permit for all “foreigners” in the mines, and the 1855 Vagrancy Act, which sanctioned the arrest and imprisonment of “idle” Mexicans and levied fines against them payable in cash or temporary service.

These class-based views of Mexicans also varied according to gender. Anglo travel literature often portrayed lower-class Mexican women as sexually promiscuous while their male counterparts were seen as hypersexual threats. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, the experience of the ethnic Mexican community—both the elite and working classes—differed dramatically from that of other racialized groups in the state. However, the treatment of Mexicans would change in the twentieth century as increased immigration made them an economic threat to the white working class. Consequently, in the minds of Anglos, the image of “the Mexican” underwent a metaphorical darkening. With this observation, Almaguer once again shows that racial ideology, coupled with class interests, were patently employed to disenfranchise Mexicans in California.

Almaguer sharpens and refocuses his analysis by detailing white supremacy’s impact on Ventura County between 1860 and 1900. This chapter, based on his doctoral dissertation, is Almaguer’s most significant contribution to our understanding of the transformation of California in this period, illustrating the way race “became the main organizing principle of group relations at the time” (p. 80). In this period, a new class structure emerged in which white men held privileged positions at the upper tiers of society and racialized ethnic groups were relegated to the bottom rung of the new order; this phenomenon was symptomatic of the “changing nature of racialized class relations in this area” (p. 80). In addition to the previously mentioned structures used to dispossess Californios of their land, four additional factors were at work to ensure that Ventura County’s Mexican elite lost their land: (1) the payment of exorbitant legal fees to Anglo lawyers, (2) sale to local merchants, (3) coerced sale to Anglo speculators, and, (4) the sale of land to pay off debt brought on by the 1860 drought. The turnover in land titles coupled with the development of agriculture enticed more Anglos to move into the county and ensured that Mexicans would be outnumbered and disenfranchised.

In order to demonstrate the unique subject position of ethnic Mexicans, Almaguer presents a case study in the form of a bitter labor dispute to show the “on-going class specific confrontation between European American and racialized ethnic groups in California” (p. 183). This altercation, the unionization drive by Japanese and Mexicans in Oxnard in 1903, allows us to peer into the window of racial and class hierarchy formation at the turn of the century. Though whites perceived the Japanese to be similar to the Chinese, and categorized them as mongrels and therefore non-white, their experiences were vastly different. The Japanese emigrating to

California were drawn from the small farmer strata of Japan whose class position was threatened by the Meiji Restoration. Because of their higher class status in relation to the competing Chinese, Mexican, and white laborers, these Japanese immigrants had a higher literacy level and by 1895 they had underbid their Chinese, Mexican, and few white competitors and were employed in almost every farm in the state. Once established, they would surprise their white employers by demanding higher wages or the renegotiation of their contracts and often resorted to strikes or work slowdowns to secure their demands. Thus, their initial low wage steadily rose. This organizing savvy would ensure that they would be instrumental in the formation of the Japanese Mexican Labor Association (JMLA), the first major agricultural workers union in California composed of racialized ethnic groups and the first to successfully challenge white capitalist interests in California.

For Almaguer, the Oxnard sugar beet workers strike waged by the JMLA provides a window into the varied racialization process that situated Japanese and Mexican farm workers in “different ‘group positions’ within the state” (p. 203). By focusing on the JMLA, Almaguer reveals European Americans’ differing racial attitudes towards Mexicans and Japanese, particularly how each group was perceived as posing different threats to the white working class. These differences in racial status, citizenship, religion, language, and the earlier competition with white workers all ensured that though the JMLA was successful in its strike, Samuel Gompers, the leader of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), would only grant the union a charter if it prohibited Asian membership. Thus, Gompers’s attitude vis-à-vis the Japanese branch of the JMLA showed that white-working-class racism distinguished between California’s racialized ethnic groups. The attitudes toward the Japanese were basically an extension of the earlier view of the Chinese. Like the Chinese, the Japanese were a perceived threat to the jobs, wages, working conditions, and overall status of free white labor in California. Mexicans, on the other hand, were not seen as posing the same danger to “the class aspirations and racial entitlements of white labor” (p. 204).

Almaguer’s approach to this history is unconventional, yet insightful, informative, and thought provoking. He has provided Chicano history with a nuanced and sophisticated rendering of racial formation in nineteenth-century California based on the latest theories of race and racialization. Almaguer goes beyond conventional sociology, which often fails to explore both ideological and structural forces impinging on populations, and instead uses the work of

the scholars mentioned above to formulate a sociological assessment that argues for the “primacy of race as the central organizing principle of hierarchical group relations in California” (p. 209). However, in his attempt to integrate the various theories informing his study, the direction of his own work is sometimes unclear. This is because Almaguer’s study is not a linear narrative of California history but a series of essays that explore a common theme, the formation of white supremacy in California. What emerges are examinations of various communities undergoing the same processes. Because the chapters often repeat information discussed in previous essays, they are sometimes difficult to read. However, the argument is never lost and is at times sharpened by this approach. Readers will be enlightened by this history, and angry that it occurred. They will understand, though, how racial formation operates today and why race is still the primary organizing principle in California and the United States in general.

Race and identity construction are core concerns of Lisbeth Haas’s *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936*. Haas focuses on the encounters that produced a sense of historical consciousness. She enters the debate on culture by questioning the notion of space to tell us how it informs racial identity. While Almaguer was informed by the work of Omi and Winant, Haas takes her cue from Edward Soja who has examined the social meaning that is derived through the organization of space and Michel Foucault who probed the relations of power and discipline and its affects on spatiality and social life. Yet, like Almaguer, Stuart Hall’s belief that cultural identities are not fixed but are “subject to the continuous play of history, power, culture” is imprinted on Haas’ work (p. 9). This “emphasis on the spatial embeddedness of power relations” drives Haas to situate her history within a “geographical framework that embraces the Spanish colonial world, the culture of Greater Mexico, the U.S. Southwest as a region, and the Borderland” (pp. 5–8). With this in mind, Haas argues that identities are “grounded in particular relationships formed through histories of race, gender, class, and place” (p. 9). Because of the historical nature of identities, they can exist simultaneously, one identity does not displace the other. Instead, identity is imagined and based on the interpretation of a specific geographical area and so can change as the use of the location changes. Thus, identity, like race, is constructed differently over time. In accordance with this view, Haas constructs a nonlinear narrative situated in the area surrounding Mission San Juan Capistrano—in present-day Orange County, California—in order to probe how the “struggles between contend-

ing social groups over who had access to the land and to the rights of citizenship” shaped and gave meaning to ethnic and national identities (p. 12).

For Haas, the Spanish conquest shaped identities in California. She argues that space played an important part in the conquest, especially since the Spanish chose locally meaningful places to stage their rituals of appropriation. The missions were an attempt to replace native structures of authority, power, and memory. This “complex ordering of space sustained the social relations that defined power and knowledge” (p. 17). It also ensured that the Indians’ culture would be a syncretic one and that native people would live in the “middle” negotiating their identities and giving them meaning according to circumstances. Thus, an Indian who was a true believer in Christianity was a rarity.

Though culturally, perhaps, the Indians were not completely subjugated legally this was another matter. In the late sixteenth-century *casta* system that the Spaniards installed in California, categories were based on purported racial heritage. In this world, the Indio—or *gente sin razón*—was at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the Spaniard—or *gente de razón*—was at the top. Yet, legally the Indians were looked upon as minors. In 1824, the newly formed Mexican republic abolished the *casta* system and, by 1826, all Indians were made “full and equal citizens under the law” (p. 33). However, in reality, freedom was contingent upon ownership of mission lands and control of Indian labor. While the Mexican federal government hoped to free Indian laborers from the mission tracts and instead convert those parcels into undistributed lands for the “public good,” the local Californios hoped to retain the labor of the former neophytes on the mission grounds. Yet, in the California Mexican elite’s expression of its identity, the 1834 *Manifiesto a la República Mexicana*, California’s sovereignty was intertwined with the neophytes’ right to their plots—ideas that would later change and ensure that the natives would not have their full rights. For, as Haas argues, the “absence of full Indian rights can be traced to the very definition of Californio territorial identity” that was contingent on the right of these “*gente de razón*” to govern all political issues in California (p. 43). Thus, both Indian identity and Californio identity were formed in response to their respective views of this contested space and to each other.

Haas probes further the complexities of identity during the Mexican period and following the American conquest. From the 1820s to the 1880s the Californios’, and subsequently the Americans’, relation to land would continue to be of foremost impor-

tance. The two groups' views of and use of property differed enormously and would be both a reflection and basis of identity. During the Mexican period, Californio elite families owned land jointly and divided it into individual parcels to provide multiple sites for grazing and planting crops. Most of this property only produced subsistence goods because California's economy was based on the hide and tallow production and trade for cloth and other items with local and foreign merchants. Though high tariffs on foreign goods aimed to stimulate manufacturing in California, industry did not develop.

The American conquest caused dramatic transformations in the use of land and ensured that identity would change for all involved. Haas argues that "Mexican land" became synonymous with "public domain" through the 1850 California Land Act, which called into question the title of thousands of acres of Californio property. That legislation violated the spirit of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and resulted in the bankruptcy of many. In order to preserve their holdings, the Californios spent large sums of money to pay attorneys' fees. At issue were the laws' contrasting views of land. While Mexican law granted property to a community and the right to its holding was inalienable, under American legal practice land took on the form of a commodity that was bought and sold or used for profit. In addition to these differing perceptions of property, Californios, as Almaguer showed, were vulnerable due to their dependence on the cattle industry for their wealth and status. The Californios' loss of land and their dwindling economic status would ensure that European immigrants and Anglo Americans, just over half of the population of Orange County in 1870, gained control over seven-eighths of the local wealth. By 1880, Anglo Americans had become the majority. Yet in San Juan Capistrano, Anglos did not overwhelm the population; instead, the town's public lands and older houses and buildings provided a stable place for workers and former Californio landowners.

Because of its use of space to provide stability and forge an identity, Haas believes that San Juan Capistrano developed a unique history that placed it outside the contours of mainstream American history. This is especially evident when one examines how the pueblo's residents viewed themselves in the 1920s and the 1930s. Rather than embracing the romanticized Spanish past, as did many California residents following the glorification of the missions as monuments in the early 1900s, the Californio and Indian residents of the town saw the mission as a representation of their past, one which included conquest and disenfranchisement. In this way, Haas

argues, Californios and Indians defined a national identity that rejected equating “American” with “white.” Instead, they forged a separate identity that attempted to define their unique rights and place in U.S. society. Thus, they were part of a larger debate over the meaning of being an “American” through which some sought to create an inclusive, rather than exclusive, portrait of America.

The debate played itself out in the Orange County town of Santa Ana, which was adjacent to San Juan Capistrano and at the heart of Anglo society. By focusing on this community, Haas provides a more nuanced understanding of the experience of early twentieth-century Mexicans, Californios and Indians. It is here, in a settlement inhabited by more Anglos than Mexicans, that Haas can explore more fully the politics of spatial segregation. However, in Santa Ana, as in other American towns, this segregation also sustained a white racial identity that was formed in opposition to an imagined “Mexican” race. This white racial identity did not actually describe a biological or ethnic makeup, but rather was constructed as an opposite to other “racial” groups and was used as a forceful political tool. The politics of race led to the emergence of barrios where a “vibrant community life developed in the spaces of the neighborhood” (p. 165).

Within the barrios, both past and present, ideas and experience, and work and religion converged. Residents forged a Mexican American identity through a sustained interaction that would set the foundation for cohesive labor activism in Southern California, most notably in the 1936 Citrus Strike. Haas argues that meetings held in Orange County barrios—in homes, not the workplace—formed the general strike committee that decided how to proceed with the strike. Building on the work of the defunct Confederación Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM), in early 1936, the Confederación Uniones Campesinos Obreros Mexicanos, together with the Filipino Labor Union, formed the Federation of Agricultural Workers of America. In March, the union outlined its demands: union recognition; the establishment of a uniform family wage for the male citrus worker, regardless of race or ethnicity; and a new structure to define labor-management relations. On June 11, 2,500 orange pickers struck. These actions were met with attacks from the agricultural industry, vigilantes, and law enforcement authorities. In addition, white women and children served as strike breakers and Los Angeles college students staffed roadside barricades. When the strike ended on June 25, none of the central demands were met. However, Haas believes that the strike is important because it allowed for “the articulation of complex identities of two genera-

tions of immigrant and native-born southern Californians [and] continued to reveal new directions for collective action and politics" (p. 208). It was efforts like this, as well as civil rights actions in the 1930s and 1940s, according to Haas, that forced an end to the affirmation of notions of white, American, and Mexican.

Though full of provocative insights and fascinating details, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* is disjointed and at times difficult to read. These problems stem primarily from Haas's admirable decision to provide a nonlinear narrative and to show the various manifestations of conquest and the formation of identity. Yet there are no explanatory sentences between sections or chapter summations, leaving the reader to connect the book's parts. On one hand, the book has extremely dense chapters and offers a micro-history of Orange County. On the other hand, it synthesizes information and paints in broad strokes. Despite these flaws, Haas's work brings to life the people of Orange County and shows us the agency they possessed and the binding structures that they sought to unravel. Haas's use of space as the key to understanding identity's construction adds to the debate on culture and expands our vision of the forces causing change in the past. Her work makes for a richer and more complex Chicano history.

While Almaguer and Haas add to the debate on culture by mostly focusing on the nineteenth century, George J. Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* answers Gómez-Quíñones's call by examining the rich and complex lives of Chicanos in the twentieth century. Like Almaguer and Haas, Sánchez is deeply influenced by the work of cultural studies scholars who call for the possibility of multiple identities and contradictory positions. Sánchez's work is also informed by Chicana feminists who have critiqued the narrow nationalist positions of early Chicano historians which excluded women from the historical narratives. He combines these approaches to examine how culture is produced historically, actively contested, temporal, and emergent. Sánchez is also interested in how culture and ethnicity work in a postindustrial age and how people respond to institutionalized capitalist principles. He argues that because Mexican migrants move between two countries, they have been the first to experience the "postmodern condition." Not only did Mexican immigrants live in a postmodern world, but by moving from one country to another, they also had to invent new traditions and discard old customs in an effort to make sense of their new terrain. Ultimately, Sánchez believes that ethnicity was "not a fixed set of customs surviving from Mexico, but rather a col-

lective identity that emerged from daily experience in the United States" (p. 11).

By placing the experience of Mexican Americans within the larger context of U.S. history, Sánchez argues that Mexicans' ethnicity was not constructed in a vacuum but through dialogue and debate with the larger world they encountered in Los Angeles. Consequently, whether through accommodation, resistance or indifference, in some way they reacted to living in the United States. Over time, Mexican immigrants did not remain Mexicans simply living in the United States. They became Mexican Americans. They went through this cultural change without much social mobility, though. With the above notions in mind, Sánchez attempts to demonstrate how this transformation took place using Los Angeles—which by 1928 had the largest Mexican population of any city in the United States—as a case study. His book blends the methodology of community studies, which probe the causes of community formation—particularly John Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*,¹⁴ as well as the work of U.S. immigration historians—who are concerned with the persistence and transformation of ethnic traditions and customs in the United States.

After detailing the border, its crossing, and the arrival of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles and what they encountered, Sánchez focuses on daily life in the city to show how identity is constructed. He presents a vignette of various institutions that impacted, and in turn were shaped by, Mexican Angelenos. Foremost among these institutions was the family. As it became harder to engage in circular migration, Mexican families adopted and adapted American practices in their daily lives and underwent a process of transformation. The social freedom found in the United States especially impacted the lives of women who were caught between the restrictive views of Mexican family life and the more liberal views of Anglos. The difference in family customs is clearly evident when Sánchez examines marriage practices. Mexican women who married a man born in the U.S., whether a Chicano or an Anglo, were more likely to have fewer children than those who married Mexican-born men. Regardless of family size, however, Sánchez argues that familial bonds helped Mexican immigrants to survive the often hostile American environment and added to the sense of community of those inside the barrio. Life within the Mexican enclave enabled immigrants to adapt to American society and yet retain aspects of the home country.

14. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Sánchez next moves to an examination of the impact of religion, popular culture, the home, and the workplace on Mexican immigrants' lives. Here he is not quite as successful as in other parts of the book. He never provides enough information to transform these sketches of daily life into full-fledged portraits. Nevertheless, he maintains his focus and shows that Mexican immigrants underwent continued adaptation and created a new culture in the process. Peering through the prism of religion, Sánchez discovers that many immigrants adapted to the United States by staying away from the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, another group sought to ensure that the church responded to its needs as ethnic Americans; it created various church organizations, such as the Mexican Young Women's Association, that had ties to Mexican culture yet were firmly Catholic and American.

In addition to the changes in religion, music was also transformed and became a "new mode of ethnic expression" (p. 176). In Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants reinforced and recreated the musical legacies of the various regions of Mexico. Immigrant musicians also stimulated the growth of the recording industry and the radio networks which, in turn, led to more musical innovation. These occurrences were part of an insular Mexican cultural renaissance of the 1920s which, for the most part, was only supported by Mexican immigrants. Thus, Sánchez argues that musicians served as "social interpreters who translated and reflected the cultural adaptations that were taking place among the Mexican immigrant population as a whole" (p. 180).

Mexican immigrants further demonstrated that adaptability to American culture through their settlement and work patterns. As opposed to other immigrant groups in the United States, Mexicans adapted to the new culture within the confines of the working class and bought homes in the barrios of East Los Angeles. Though this process ensured the forging of communities and the development of a sense of permanency, it also meant that, for the most part, Mexicans often lived in housing they could afford outside the city limits. For example, in Belvedere developers offered cheap plots because they could ignore municipal statutes concerning size, sewage, and other services. Yet, Mexicans made the most of these conditions and fought for control of their neighborhoods and their futures.

After setting up the contours of the Mexican American community in Los Angeles, Sánchez examines the way in which this population's existence was disrupted and again transformed through the experience of the Great Depression. The economic crisis of the

late 1920s and the 1930s had a profound affect on the size of the Mexican American community. Because of the deportation and repatriation campaigns during the depression, nationwide 400,000 Mexicans returned to their homeland; Los Angeles lost one-third of its Mexican residents. Though concerned with telling the stories of the individuals affected by these actions, which Sánchez does with great compassion, he is also interested in showing the effect of this upheaval on the future of Los Angeles's ethnic Mexican community. First, repatriation silenced the Mexican immigrant generation in Los Angeles and ensured that it would be less visible. Second, and more importantly, the exodus of single men and young Mexican families ensured that second-generation Mexicans gained dominance in the city. The ratio of native-born to foreign-born went from 91 percent in 1930 to 164 percent in 1940. Thus, the depression, deportations, and repatriation campaigns transformed Los Angeles's Mexican community into a smaller but more vocal population.

This changed population was clearly present in labor union activity. According to Sánchez, labor activism allowed the Mexican American community to develop a dual identity and also led to the development of a civil rights agenda. Though large unions like the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) often did not respond to the needs of Mexicans, they nonetheless fostered an inclusive sense of Americanism that was typical of the era and that allowed ethnic workers, including Mexicans, to consider themselves part of the social tapestry of the nation. Perhaps the best example of this outlook was the Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española which, during its short lifespan (1939–1943), pressed for the civil rights of Mexican Americans. The training that this generation of activists gained through union activism and the Congreso ensured that these “new” Mexican Americans, “steeped in the strong base of working-class experience and Mexican traditions, immediately involved themselves in directions which reformulated the boundaries of Chicano culture and society” (p. 252).

Sánchez concludes his book, gathering its various strands through an examination of the Mexican American Movement (MAM) before the Second World War, an organization which he believes reveals “the development of ideologies among second-generation youth and demonstrates how they viewed themselves and their surroundings” (p. 256). Sánchez argues that most of “the cultural identity and sense of self of second generation Mexican Americans was already shaped before the war” (p. 256). MAM's central philosophy was that Mexican people in the United States

could succeed through education—a view that reflected the group's predominantly student membership. MAM members naively believed that only a lack of knowledge kept “Mexicans from advancing in American society” (p. 257). However, as Sánchez makes clear, MAM members were an anomaly among Mexican American students; during the 1930s over 50 percent of this group's girls and 40 percent of its boys dropped out of Los Angeles schools between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. In addition, many could not find adequate jobs and became estranged from society. Thus, MAM members' claim that they represented the vast majority of youths in their late teens and early twenties was exaggerated. This reality, along with the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots and other racist incidents, made it clear to this emerging second generation that they were indeed caught between two cultures, as most Mexican Americans remain today.

Sánchez's book is sometimes uneven in its scope. Nevertheless, he provides a fresh and innovative insight into the process of cultural change. His creative use of sources (naturalization records, oral histories, maps, city directories, census data) coupled with his application of theory does much to expand the nature of Chicano history. Though the book comes to an anticlimactic conclusion, its value lies in the way that Sánchez skillfully develops his argument and makes the various parts of the book come together. In trying to present a comprehensive portrait of the process of cultural change, Sánchez sometimes glosses over important developments. This problem is evident in his section on religion and music which is pedestrian and never fully developed. Ultimately, Sánchez contributes much to our knowledge of becoming Mexican American. His work will encourage future Chicano/a historians to examine culture as fluid and evolving rather than as a static and unchanging phenomenon. Though one historian has recently lauded Sánchez for creating a “new ‘borderlands’ framework that may at last answer the challenges that postmodernity poses to social sciences,”¹⁵ I would argue that Sánchez is instead fulfilling the promise of the Chicano history project—which emerged from, and is in many ways in opposition to, Herbert Eugene Bolton's Borderlands school—to construct a history that is relevant, informative, and empowering. Ultimately, he is adding a new dimension to Gómez-Quíñones' call to debate on culture.

In *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* David G. Gutiérrez offers a vi-

15. Philip Ethington, “Toward a Borderlands School for American Urban Ethnic Studies?” *American Quarterly* 48, 2. (June 1996).

brant, sophisticated, and powerful addition to Chicano history that nicely complements the other books reviewed. As opposed to the white supremacy, space, or community, that the other authors believe are of foremost importance in the construction of identity, Gutiérrez argues that the influx of Mexican immigrants into the United States reconfigures Mexican Americans' notions of identity and community. By studying the historical debate over immigration, Gutiérrez also attempts to show that there are "deeper, persistent differences among Mexican Americans and permanent Mexican immigrants over their political, social and cultural future in the United States" (p. 7). Thus, like Almaguer, Haas, and Sánchez, he too believes in a multifaceted ethnic Mexican community. Like the other authors, Gutiérrez has been deeply influenced by cultural studies' scholars. However, he combines those newer ideas with older scholarship to more fully explain his view of ethnicity. In contrast to Sánchez, who argues for the social construction of ethnicity, Gutiérrez combines Hall's observations on identity formation with E. K. Francis's ideas and argues that ethnicity is socially constructed but also encompasses primordial elements. Gutiérrez believes that ethnic identity can be used as a tool to resist mainstream American institutions. According to Gutiérrez, blending Hall's and Francis's views on ethnicity makes sense because discrimination against Mexican Americans reinforced their own sense of distinctiveness. Mexican immigration bolstered racism against Mexican Americans, ensuring that they would become what Gutiérrez calls a "situation or circumstantial ethnic group" (p. 7). Gutiérrez explores the "differences that divided and the commonalities that bound the two groups—the walls and mirrors that so clearly characterized their relationship in the United States" and "illuminate some puzzling, unexplored dimensions of Mexican American political and social history" (p. 4).

Gutiérrez uses a chronological approach to tell his story and in so doing constructs a synthesis of Chicano history with immigration as its driving force. He starts with the period just after the U.S.-Mexican War when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established a new border and transformed the lives of the 75,000 to 100,000 Mexicans in what became the American Southwest. Though this population was given "all the rights of citizens," it was not given the opportunity to exercise them and was eventually relegated to an inferior social status, while losing most of its political and economic power, as Almaguer and Haas have demonstrated. These hardships engendered a more cohesive Mexican American community. The American conquest ensured that members of this popula-

tion, who at best were on the fringes of Mexican society and saw themselves as distinct from their southern brethren, now recognized their solidarity with Mexicans. Yet, Mexican Americans maintained their own way of life and resisted continued Yankee encroachments on it. Ironically, according to Gutiérrez, Mexican Americans baffled those Anglo Americans who sought to suppress and obliterate them; instead of vanishing into the mainstream, Mexican Americans affirmed their presence in U.S. society by constructing a new sense of community and developing a distinct culture.

After establishing the nature of the Mexican American community, Gutiérrez shows how it was transformed through the large-scale Mexican immigration of the 1890s through the 1920s. The influx of over a million Mexican immigrants, drawn to the U.S. as a result of the *porfiriato's* draconian land policies, the Mexican Revolution, and the expansion of the American Southwestern economy, rejuvenated the strong Mexican presence in the United States and led to the resurgence of the culture, customs, and language of the old country. But this was no Mexican American utopia. Instead, the potential for solidarity between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants was undermined by the internal differences within the groups and the competition for jobs, housing, and social services. Before the arrival of the newcomers Mexican Americans had formed a separate niche for themselves in Anglo-American society that often protected them from the more virulent forms of discrimination. This haven was shattered when Anglo Americans made no distinction between Mexican Americans and their immigrant brethren and the discrimination and prejudices aimed at the newcomers spilled over to long-term residents. Consequently, Mexican Americans were "compelled to reconsider the criteria by which they defined themselves" (p. 67).

Gutiérrez next focuses on the divisions within the Mexican American community over the issue of Mexican immigration in the interwar period. In this era Mexican Americans were divided into two camps; some believed that they should empathize with their immigrant brethren while others made every effort to assimilate and to distance themselves from the newcomers. In addition to this tension, the repatriation campaigns traumatized and disoriented individuals and families. Out of this crucible emerged the Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples which Gutiérrez, like Sánchez, believes fostered and encouraged ethnocultural and class solidarity among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. The congress argued that the walls separating the two groups ratified the loathsome distinctions that Americans placed on Mexican Americans. Conse-

quently, the congress linked the plight of Mexican immigrants with Mexican Americans' quest for equal rights as American citizens and, in the process, broadened the public discourse on the place of, and procedure for, incorporating the nation's immigrants and ethnic minorities into American society. By so doing, the congress, along with other groups, demanded full civil rights for Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants and insisted that ethnic Mexican residents' full cultural rights be recognized. According to Gutiérrez, this radical position "sought to transform mainstream American perceptions of what constituted a proper American" (p. 116).

Gutiérrez examines the effect of Mexican immigration on Mexican American identity in the decade from 1940 to 1950. As in other eras, Mexican Americans as a whole were still plagued by discrimination that both hindered their advancement and contributed to community formation. Racist incidents continued, evidenced through the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots, while the struggle for civil rights' was for the most part suppressed in order to concentrate on the war effort. In the midst of this turmoil the wartime demand for labor attracted new Mexican immigrants through the 1942 Emergency Farm Labor Program, commonly known as the Bracero Program. Although these Mexican immigrants were officially sanctioned by the U.S. government, some Mexican American groups believed that unnaturalized Mexican nationals represented a threat to their social and political position. But, courageous activists defended the rights of Mexican nationals in the United States and aided the newly arrived braceros. This large influx of newcomers once again forced ethnic Mexicans of both nationalities to ponder the issues of immigration policy, their ethnic identity, and their children's future in the United States. Though thousands of Mexican Americans began to consider themselves Americans in this epoch, Gutiérrez believes that just as many remained ambivalent about their cultural and national identity.

Gutiérrez argues that during the Cold War era the ambivalence of the past changed into activism as Mexican American organizations explicitly linked the rights of Mexican immigrants with the civil rights of Mexican Americans. Groups including the Community Service Organization (CSO), the Asociación México Americana, El Comité Defensor del Pueblo, and the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born believed that focusing on the differences between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants diverted attention from the discrimination affecting both populations. Indeed, during this era repression initiated by the 1950 Inter-

nal Security Act and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act affected both immigrants and non-immigrants. In addition, the ethnic Mexican community witnessed federal agents' massive sweeps of "illegals" following the enactment of what was pejoratively called Operation Wetback in 1954. Yet Mexican Americans remained divided on the issue of Mexican immigration as was evident in the National Agricultural Worker's Union and the American G.I. Forum's call to end the Bracero Program and the latter's broadside against undocumented workers, "What Price Wetbacks?" Despite these divisions, activists in this period planted the seeds of a positive sense of ethnic identity among politically active Mexican Americans that would blossom in the 1960s.

According to Gutiérrez, the late 1970s witnessed Mexican Americans' unprecedented agreement on the issue of Mexican immigration. With the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, the immigration question virtually disappeared as an issue among Mexican Americans. Instead, influenced by global and national identity politics in the 1960s, Chicanos questioned their place within the political, social, and cultural tapestry of the United States. Eventually, in the Cisneros case in 1971, a U.S. District Court defined them as an identifiable minority group. Such grassroots and legal actions sparked the reemergence of the immigration issue within the ethnic Mexican community. In addition, the response of the State of California and the federal government to the entry of nearly one million undocumented immigrants to the United States by 1977 in the form of the proposed Dixon Arnett and Rodino bills, ensured that Mexican Americans would take up the mantle of immigrant rights. Chicano groups realized as did the Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA), that "to learn how to protect the rights of workers without papers is to learn how to protect ourselves" (p. 203). Consequently, in 1977 the First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy united diverse groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Mexican American Political Association, the G.I. Forum, La Raza Unida Party, and CASA to battle President Carter's Plan. This proposed legislation called for, among other things, the imposition of legal sanctions for habitual employers of undocumented workers and limited amnesty for hundreds of thousands of "illegal aliens" in the U.S. In three days of meetings, the conference "participants passed a series of unanimous resolutions condemning the Carter Plan as discriminatory against both citizens and aliens of Latin descent" (p. 179). For Gutiérrez, this meeting marks the culmination of "nearly a half century of Mexican American debate on the issue of immigration"

that engendered an unprecedented unity lasting until the 1980s when the proposal of the Simpson-Mazzoli bill (p. 202) raised new questions. However, he warns that this unity should not obscure the divisions that remained among Mexican American and Chicano activists over the nature of politics, identity, and community. Gutiérrez believes that these cleavages were "symptomatic of the fractured nature of the Mexican American experience throughout the twentieth century" (p. 204).

Gutiérrez ends his book by examining the contemporary debate on Mexican immigration and linking it to the dispute over multiculturalism. He argues that both are part of a larger "strategy targeted at Mexican American, Latino, and other minority civil rights and community activists who have recently begun to exert a significant influence in American politics" (p. 213). Thus, the issue of Mexican immigration affects not only Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, but also the meaning of the republic as it moves into the next millennium. Gutiérrez believes that decisions about the future of ethnic politics in the United States will determine whether the racial, class, and cultural faultlines will remain or whether Americans will realize that they are a heterogeneous population, and that all must be incorporated into the life of the nation, so that in this way the United States can become a truly participatory democracy.

Walls and Mirrors is a well-written, meticulously researched, passionately argued and dynamic addition to Chicano history. While the other authors develop their theses in a repetitive, fragmented, or strained manner, Gutiérrez is succinct, always stays on track, and develops his thesis through various time periods. Thus, he presents a continuous variation on the theme of Mexican newcomers impacting the Mexican American community and transforming their community. He places the issue of immigration at the center of Chicano history and, in the process, shows the complex nature of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States.

The above books demonstrate that the field of Chicano history is alive and well and that, while Chicano studies scholars may question and probe essentialized notions of identity and culture and look for reasons for their social constructions, they are not giving up on the idea of their uniqueness. This is because identity and culture are ultimately the only weapons that people possess to battle the seemingly reactionary forces of the current "state of emergency." As the work of these scholars shows, identity and culture have been used to ensure continued existence rather than elimination in the past. Yet this is not a bad thing. The postcolonial critic

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak believes, "that since it is not possible not to be an essentialist, one can self-consciously use this irreducible moment of essentialism as part of one's strategy."¹⁶ She believes that "no . . . representation can take place without essentialism."¹⁷ Therefore, in representing their subjects these historians, as well as Gómez-Quíñones before them, are using a "strategic use of essentialism."¹⁸ At this historical moment, and in order to maintain the field of Chicano history, there is no other option. I hope the work of these scholars will truly redefine how we look at Chicano identity, culture, and, ultimately, communities in the United States. Only by reconceptualizing the past can we truly forge a just future.

16. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 109.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid