New Directions in the Chicano History Of California

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Racial Faultlines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California. By Tomás Almaguer. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination. By Martha Menchaca. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950). By Gilbert G. Gonzalez. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal. By Devra Weber. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity. By David G. Gutierrez. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

To preserve their city's history, the citizens of San José established a living historical museum. It has numerous replicas of buildings from the Victorian era: a light tower, residential houses, the most popular hotel, and a livery stable. There are also prune orchards to remind visitors of the city's agricultural past and a Chinese temple to remember the Chinese presence in San José since the 1850s. The historical museum accurately depicts the architecture and life of San José during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Yet, this re-creation of San José is not only misleading but also damaging to the non-white residents. It completely ignores the town's indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican roots. The museum gives the impression that San José is a uniquely Anglo American city.

Today, San José has a population of nearly 900,000. Although many residents are native-born, thousands of others have come

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from elsewhere. Natives and new arrivals only have scant knowledge of the city's history. Numerous San Joseans may wonder why the city carries a Spanish name and not "St. Joseph." They may not know that the original *pueblo* was called San José de Guadalupe and that it was founded by mestizos, Indians from northern Mexico, and *españoles* flying the flag of Spain. Finally, they may not know that Mexicans introduced the first town government, created the first urban institutions, and gave the region the agricultural and ranching foundations that would dominate its economy until the 1960s. People of Mexican ancestry have and continue to play an important role in the economies of San José and the Santa Clara Valley (now better known as Silicon Valley).

Because the historical museum re-creates only Victorian San José, people acquire the impression that the city had no history before the arrival of Anglo Americans to the region. For people of Mexican ancestry, who now represent 25 percent of the city's population, this perception gives them a sense of being foreigners with no historical ties to San José. This sense of being outsiders has powerfully affected Mexican Americans' sense of who they are, their place in society, and their involvement in the political life of the city.

Anglo Americans have ignored the history of Mexicans not only in San José but also throughout California and the rest of the Southwest. The books reviewed in this essay give important recognition to Mexican American history and examine new areas of research. Tomas Almaguer's *Racial Faultlines* focuses on the racialization of California after 1850. In *Mexican Outsiders*, Martha Menchaca studies the deliberate efforts of whites in Santa Paula to ignore their town's indigenous and Mexican history and to implement a policy of "social apartness," which led to the racial segregation of Santa Paula. In *Labor and Community*, Gilbert G. Gonzalez breaks ground by challenging the prevailing thinking among historians that after 1900 Chicanos and Mexican immigrants were becoming urban dwellers. Gonzalez looks at the lives of Mexican citrus workers who resided in rural villages throughout Orange County, California. Devra Weber in *Dark Sweat, White Gold* also challenges the traditional view among historians that laborers are people who do not control their work environment. She notes that in spite of the vast influence of cotton growers over local and state government and their substantial economic power, Mexican workers organized and maintained a massive strike in the San Joaquin Valley in 1933. The ability of the workers to prolong the strike compelled the federal government to intervene, which led to a partial workers' vic-

tory. Finally, David G. Gutierrez's book, *Walls and Mirrors*, analyzes the impact of acculturation and assimilation on people of Mexican ancestry. Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and Chicanos have developed a diverse sense of identity. This in turn has affected their outlook on culture and their political views, including the question of U.S. policy towards Mexican immigration.

Racialization in California

People usually perceive race relations in the United States as a black/white paradigm. In *California Faultlines*, Tomas Almaguer contends that this view is limiting, especially for the multiracial society of California. He correctly points out that one cannot assume that the African American racial experience is the same as that which Native Americans, Asians, and Chicanos have had to confront. After the United States took possession of California, Almaguer argues, European Americans implanted a modern capitalist economy designed solely to benefit themselves while subjugating and exploiting every non-white racial group. To justify their dominant position, Almaguer notes that European American men resorted to racialization, "the ideological process in structuring hierarchical relations of group inequality."[1] He writes,

> European American men in securing a privileged social status was typically exacted through contentious, racialized struggles with Mexican, Native American and Asian immigrants over land ownership or labor market position.[2]

Almaguer suggests that the racial order that European Americans installed in California subordinated each group differently. Each racial group was placed in a rank below white Americans according to the group's approximation to the white race and its closeness to European cultures. Since Mexicans were half European—*mestizos*—and had adopted aspects of European culture, including Catholicism, they were assigned a level just below white Americans. Blacks were positioned at the next lower level because they spoke English and had converted to Christianity. European Americans regarded Asians as superior to Native Americans yet nevertheless a degraded race due to their pagan beliefs, unintelligible language, and strange dress. Indians were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy; "devils of the forest," they were savages who impeded the path of European American progress and civilization.

1. Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

2. Ibid. Almaguer regards Anglo American men as oppressors but white women, in spite of playing subordinate roles, also helped maintain the racialized structure.

Almaguer claims that because European Americans accepted Mexicans as partly European both racially and culturally, Mexicans fared better than any other non-white racial group. A significant number of marriages occurred between white males and upper-class Mexican women. Through intermarriage European American society gradually absorbed some elite Mexican families. White Americans integrated upper class Californios into their ranks in other ways as well. In spite of their belief that Mexicans were half savages, they allowed European-looking Mexicans to vote and to hold political office. Moreover, although most Californio landowners would eventually lose their properties to squatters or to their own inability to continue lengthy and costly legal appeals, the courts at first recognized the validity of hundreds of their titles.

Whites considered Asians, in contrast to Mexicans, to be aliens who possessed a foreign culture and who more closely resembled Indians: Asian immigrants could not be assimilated into California society. Besides being Mongoloid, speaking unfamiliar languages, and possessing cultural practices which whites found reprehensible, Asian immigrants were perceived as economic competitors. White Americans deeply believed that only they were entitled to benefit from the natural resources that abounded in California. Thus, they forcefully drove Chinese and Latino miners out of the gold fields during the Gold Rush; in the 1850s, the California legislature enacted several laws which required foreign miners to pay a monthly tax for working in the gold fields. Almaguer believes that since the Chinese were the largest non-white population in California, they were the primary targets of the foreign miners tax laws.

As a result of a labor shortage, Chinese immigrants were allowed to become the primary labor force in building the western part of the Transcontinental Railroad. After its completion, when Chinese workers became engaged in agriculture, the fishing industry, and various branches of the service industry, white laborers began to see the Chinese as competitors for jobs. The belief that they belonged to a superior race blinded European American workers to the possibility of establishing a class alliance with their Asian counterparts. Almaguer notes,

> Although Chinese and white workers may have shared some underlying class interest, these interests never crystallized in common opposition to capitalist interests. Instead white craftsmen and other skilled workers consistently sought to maintain their privileged racial status over the Chinese and, in the process, reaffirmed the centrality of race as the primary organizing principle of Nineteenth Century Anglo California.[3]

3. Ibid, 181.

The white workers' animosity toward the Chinese and a growing perception by businessmen that these immigrants represented a potential threat to them unleashed a campaign to cease Chinese immigration to the United States. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Almaguer notes that European American capitalists hoped to replace the Chinese laborers with Japanese. From 1880 to 1900, thousands of Japanese immigrants took over many jobs that Chinese workers had previously. European Americans, however, started detecting contemptible qualities in the Japanese. They believed that the Japanese were unwilling to accept their role as menial workers; also, they were too group oriented. Capitalists observed how the Japanese used their traditional group cohesiveness to bargain for better wages. To make things worse, the Japanese used their organizational skills to form alliances with Mexican farm workers. In 1903, Japanese and Mexican sugar beet workers in Ventura County banded together demanding union recognition and better wages. The workers won a partial victory. Because of the reputation of the Japanese as an unmanageable labor force, white capitalists concluded that the "submissive" Mexican immigrants would make a more ideal workforce.

Almaguer believes that while white Americans saw Mexicans, Asians, and blacks as half savages, they felt that Indians embodied both heathenism and savagery. Almaguer makes a keen observation of how drastically different were the European Americans' perceptions of Mexicans and Indians.

> Whereas the relations between Anglo and Mexican "citizens" were institutionally mediated, white and Indian societies confronted one another in the frontier wilderness of the state, not in courtrooms, voting booths, town meetings, the labor market, or juridical contestations over land.[4]

Anglo Americans felt that while Mexicans could be integrated into their society at a subordinated level, there was no place in it for Indians. Native Americans were seen as obstacles to Anglo American civilization and therefore had to be removed or exterminated. Almaguer gives numerous accounts of white American raids which devastated Indian settlements throughout Northern California. As a result of disease, hunger and massacres, some sanctioned by state or federal authorities, the Indian population fell sharply—from 150,000 in 1845, to 100,000 in 1850, and 16,000 in 1880. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Indians barely managed to survive on the fringes of an ever expanding Anglo California.

Almaguer should be commended for his conceptualization of

4. Ibid, 107.

the racial hierarchy in California during the second half of the nineteenth century. His racialization thesis effectively illustrates that while Anglo American racism deeply affected blacks, Indians, Asians, and Mexicans, each of these groups experienced different kinds and degrees of racism.

The problem with Almaguer's conceptualization of California as a racially hierarchical society is that it may lead to over-generalization. Since Almaguer chiefly focuses on describing the atrocities that whites inflicted on Northern California Indians, the reader assumes that all California Indians suffered the same fate. Is it not possible that Anglo Americans expressed a higher acceptability of the coastal and Mission Indians because they were Mexicanized? It is likely that Anglo Americans saw these Indians as lower-class Mexicans or at least as half-civilized. The racialization concept can also soften the view that Mexicans in California were a conquered people. A nineteenth century Californio would have a difficult time believing that he was better off than other non-white groups. While some Californio elite families like the Sunols, Vallejos, de la Guerras, Estudillos, and Bandinis experienced some success in being integrated into Anglo American society, most Mexicans met much hostility and suffered immensely at the hands of Anglos. The majority of Mexicans lost their lands and became politically disempowered. Moreover, hundreds of them lost their lives. No doubt Almaguer is fully aware that after the Indians, no other racial minority suffered more killings than Mexicans. The racialization concept also does not take into consideration the psychological damage that Californios must have experienced as a result of having lost their country and having been forced to accept the Anglo American way of life. Perhaps it may be more correct to place Asians in the rank below white Americans in the racial hierarchy. While Asian immigrants were abused and exploited, they fared better than Mexicans because they did not carry with them the legacy of being a conquered people.

History of Mexicans in Santa Paula and Social Apartness

Just as Almaguer advanced the notion that Anglos racialized California society, Martha Menchaca, in her book *The Mexican Outsiders*, argues that Anglo Americans have ignored the Mexican history of many California cities and towns. Menchaca claims that "... Racial minorities are essentially robbed of their historical presence and treated as a people without a history. The exclusion also serves to construct a distorted community because issues of interethnic con-

tact are deleted from the historical discourse."[5] In the case of Santa Paula, California, Menchaca points out that Anglo Americans believe that the city owes its origins to the families that founded the citrus industry. She notes that people of Mexican descent and the Chumash Indians, the native people of the area, are ignored in the conventional historical record. Most Santa Paulans are unaware that the Chumash Indians resided in the area long before the arrival of Anglo Americans and that Mexicans colonized the region and planted the first citrus orchards. Because of the absence of Mexicans in the traditional history of Santa Paula, Menchaca proposes to correct and add to the town's history. She believes that such elaboration is necessary to better understand how the past has affected the city's contemporary social relations.

Key to understanding the history of Santa Paula is Menchaca's concept of "social apartness." It refers to a system of social control in which Mexicans were expected to interact with Anglo Americans only on Anglo American terms. Hence, whites determined the proper time and place in which both groups could come into contact.

Menchaca maintains that Anglo Americans came to control most of the land in Santa Paula by the 1880s. Although they bought some properties, many were acquired through squatting. Some Anglo Americans took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1852 which gave settlers the right to claim land if they permanently resided on it and made property improvements. After 1880, landowners founded a booming citrus industry which gave them considerable wealth as well as political clout. Citrus growers and their political agents passed city ordinances which prohibited Mexicans from purchasing homes in West Santa Paula. With the expansion of the citrus industry, growers recruited more Mexican workers who settled in the town. As the Mexican population grew, citrus growers took additional steps to keep it apart from the Anglos residents. White Americans built separate churches, arguing that God did not want Mexicans and Anglo Americans to socialize. In 1913, they built a Protestant church, the Spanish Union Mission. In 1929, growers constructed Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.

Anglo Americans also practiced segregation in education. According to Menchaca, after 1913 school authorities deliberately segregated Mexican students for supposedly pedagogical reasons. They claimed that limited or non-English speaking children impeded the

5. Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), xiv.

academic progress of Anglo American children. Menchaca, however, observes that the racial overtones of the practice were apparent since Mexican students who did not speak Spanish were also forced to attend separate classes.

Menchaca contends that beginning in the 1940s, Mexicans started to dismantle the system of social apartness in Santa Paula. At that time, several local Mexican millionaires, with the support of the local chamber of commerce, managed to nullify ordinances that prevented them from buying homes in West Santa Paula. By the late 1950s, more and more middle-class Mexican Americans were purchasing homes in the western part of town. Many whites, however, expressed their opposition by moving out of the area. Mexican youth also contributed to the demolition of segregation. In the 1950s, some of these youth decided to sit on the Anglo side of the only theater in Santa Paula. In time, more Mexican youth sat on the Anglo section and refused to move in spite of threats that the police would be called. Eventually, the theater owners decided to allow Mexicans to sit wherever they pleased because they feared a Mexican boycott. The desegregation of large stores such as J.C. Penney followed a similar pattern.

Menchaca suggests that there is a correlation between the decline of social apartness and the increasing political strength of Mexican Americans. In 1957, Mexicans defeated a "cantina tax" that would have required bar owners who sold liquor to braceros to pay a $500 annual tax. The Mexican community argued that since the citrus growers were the ones who had brought and employed the braceros, they should pay the tax. In 1958, the Latin American Civic Organization (LACO) nominated three Mexican American candidates for the city council, one of whom was elected. After 1960, Mexican Americans won seats in the city council or were being appointed to city commissions. By the late 1900s, a new interethnic alliance of whites and Mexican Americans had replaced the citrus growers as the dominant force in city politics. Nonetheless, Menchaca notes that social apartness did not completely die out in Santa Paula. School segregation remains prevalent and Anglos insist on attending their own churches. Social clubs, stores, restaurants, and other public places may be legally integrated but Anglo Americans still determine when and where social contact can take place.

Martha Menchaca does an admirable job of combining orthodox sources of history such as newspapers and local history accounts with untraditional sources such as interviews with townspeople. The interviews with Mexican and Mexican American

sources are of great value because they provide a more ample perspective of Santa Paula's history. These sources enable historians to write history "from the bottom up." Yet, the manner in which Menchaca identifies her sources weakens her book. Thinking more like an anthropologist than a historian, Menchaca gives her sources fictitious names. While this may be a standard practice when dealing in contemporary subjects, it is impractical in historical analysis. What is the purpose of not identifying sources who provide information on the history of Santa Paula from 1900 to 1970? It is likely that these sources, some of whom are local historians, want to be identified by their real names. Menchaca does not even identify local Mexican businessmen and political activists, although these individuals not only were well-known public figures but also were cited in newspapers.

Mexican Citrus Worker Colonias in Orange County

Like Menchaca, Gilbert G. Gonzalez researched a group of Mexicans in the United States that scholars have long neglected. Gonzalez claims there is a widespread assumption that, since the early 1900s, people of Mexican ancestry have become urban. To dispel this myth, Gonzalez notes that the 1930 U.S. Census indicates that 50 percent of Chicanos and Mexican immigrants lived in rural areas. In *Labor and Community,* Gonzalez studied fourteen, rural *colonias* of Mexican citrus workers in Orange County. He argues that the study of rural Chicanos is essential because they are a part of Chicano history and "an integral component of U.S. social history . . ."[6]

The history of the Orange County colonias is directly connected to the expansion of the citrus industry. This industry dates back to the late nineteenth century and initially it relied on Chinese and Japanese labor. By the early 1900s, the citrus industry had expanded into twelve Southern California counties, from San Diego to Santa Barbara. At the height of its prosperity in the 1930s, it produced 60 percent of the nation's orange crop and employed thousands of Mexicans as pickers and packers. Growers considered Mexicans the ideal labor force. Charles Teague, head of the California Fruit Growers Exchange, wrote that Mexicans ". . . are naturally adapted to agricultural work, particularly in the handling of fruits

6. Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Labor and Community: Mexican Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 5. While it is important to see Mexican immigrants as part of U.S. history, it is equally important to see these *mexicanos de afuera* as part of Mexican history.

and vegetables."[7] To secure a more permanent labor force, citrus growers through their trade associations established labor camps for Mexican migrant workers.

Although Orange County citrus growers had used single men for the first two decades of the twentieth century, they came to believe that these workers were not very reliable for they tended to migrate frequently. Consequently, growers built or encouraged family housing in order to retain a permanent workforce. Interviews that Gonzalez conducted with former labor camp residents confirm the growers' beliefs that family housing was key to preserving their workers. There were three types of residential sites: (1) camps that were owned by growers, (2) company owned tracts with independent communities, and (3) private residential communities free of company ownership. These worker colonias, which Gonzalez calls rural villages, were located within city limits though usually on the outskirts of towns.

Gonzalez maintains that while the labor camps were barely livable, the residents developed effective survival strategies. Although the houses were simple structures with no indoor plumbing, their owners, some of whom possessed masonry, carpentry, or other construction skills, enlarged and improved them. Families also performed miracles with the slim earnings of their working members. For example, they pooled their resources to buy in quantity at lower prices. It was very typical for families to buy one-hundred-pound sacks of beans and flour, forty-five-pound cans of lard, and five-pound boxes of coffee. In addition, colonia residents raised chickens, goats, ducks, and pigs as well as grew corn, squash, chilies, tomatoes, and lettuce.

Gonzalez believes that the colonia residents were intent on conserving and even promoting their Mexican culture. In their settlements, workers established all the social, economic, and cultural institutions that had existed in Mexican rural villages. They continued Mexican family traditions and customs, they spoke the Spanish language, replicated Mexican architectural styles in their houses, worked traditional artisan crafts, and celebrated Mexican religious and national holidays. Gonzalez provides very detailed accounts of the colonias' celebrations of patriotic holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Dieciseis de Septiembre and of religious festivities such as Christmas and the remembrance of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe.[8]

7. Ibid, 28.

8. Gonzalez claims that the people of the colonias brought with them the rural cultures of Mexico. It is more accurate to say that these Mexican immigrants shared a single national Mexican culture.

Like other Orange County Anglo Americans, citrus growers did not believe that Mexican children needed much education but realized that public schools should give them a rudimentary education. The schools emphasized providing these students with vocational skills and taught metal shop, auto mechanics, carpentry, and agriculture, etc. Most children never went beyond intermediate school. Gonzalez writes, "In the educators' minds, high school for Mexican children did not imply a freedom to branch into coursework beyond vocational arts."[9] In addition to tolerating a basic education for Mexican children, growers associations encouraged Americanization classes for adults. In Americanization centers, Mexican women learned not only English but also methods of disease prevention, sanitation, and health care. Furthermore, these centers offered free health clinics, vaccinations, and free medical examinations.

Gonzalez maintains that citrus growers encountered little labor unrest in the first decade of the twentieth century. Workers could not seek better wages because they were unable to negotiate with individual growers. Grower associations established the wages, schedules, and hiring practices, and determined the criteria for distinguishing "good" and "bad" pickers. The most effective workers' challenge to the growers was the massive strike of 1936. Thousands of orange pickers walked out from the groves, and were so successful in turning away potential strikebreakers that the county sheriff divided his jurisdiction into three semi-military zones to control the roving brigades of strikers. After several weeks of negotiation, a strike committee and the growers reached an agreement: The growers would grant workers higher wages but would not recognize the workers' union.

Gonzalez believes that the 1936 citrus strike convinced growers of the need for a new source of labor. They could no longer rely on the colonias' workforce. After World War II, growers began to recruit more and more Mexican braceros. Gonzalez claims that these braceros displaced the more established Mexican immigrants who had no choice but to seek other sources of employment. Hundreds of citrus workers, however, left the groves as they entered the armed services or obtained better jobs in the swelling war-time industries.

Gonzalez does a good job in documenting the history of the rural Mexican citrus workers of Orange County. A major problem with the analysis, however, is his overeagerness to show that citrus workers were becoming a part of American society and culture.

9. Gonzalez, *Labor and Community*, 103.

From Gonzalez's excellent discussion of life and culture in the rural colonias, it can be observed that in spite of acculturation pressures, the residents actively re-created many traditional institutions of Mexico and much of its culture. The people of the colonias saw themselves as *mexicanos* and identified themselves with Mexico. They chose to remain Mexicans for a longer time than many historians suspect.

Part of Gonzalez's desire to present the citrus workers as an acculturating people is related to his belief that they are a part of U.S. history. While no one disputes this view, one needs to recognize that these immigrants are part of Mexican history as well. Their refusal to completely surrender their Mexican connections, such as culture and family ties, makes them a binational people. Citrus workers, like many other people of Mexican ancestry, continue to have a binational history.

Mexican Workers and the 1933 San Joaquin Valley Cotton Strike

Numerous studies of Mexican immigrant and Chicano workers usually depict them as "victims" incapable of affecting their condition. Devra Weber, in *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, disputes this traditional interpretation. She contends that, in spite of the farmers' enormous economic power and formidable connections to local, state, and even federal authorities, Mexican workers were players in their struggle to achieve a better life. Weber comments,

> Studies lumped agricultural workers together as "victims" of the system. Yet the image of the victim, with its implied absence of will, choice, or creativity devalues the intangible human elements workers brought with them: their work culture, national consciousness, experience as workers, history of organization and struggles. All of these components, which themselves differed over time and among the workers, together shaped how they would respond.[10]

In 1933, Mexican workers, rather than union leaders, assumed coordination of the day-to-day activities of the extensive San Joaquin Valley Cotton Strike.

Weber points out that the cotton industry in the San Joaquin Valley encountered severe difficulties before it began to thrive. As they were developing their industry in the late 1800s, cotton farmers struggled as a result of the numerous varieties of cotton that

10. Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 202.

they planted. Finally, they and the state government collaborated to make the Acala cotton strain the standard. In a short time, a few large growers and ginners dominated the industry, although there were hundreds of small cotton growers. With the emergence of cotton as a major agricultural product, Mexican workers also became the industry's main labor force. Mexicans made up 80 percent of workers in the cotton fields in 1926. Before their arrival in the San Joaquin Valley, many of these laborers already had the experience of having worked in the Mexican cotton districts of Durango and Baja California.

Weber believes that several factors that enabled Mexican workers to undertake the 1933 Corcoran strike. First, the Mexicans who came to work already had a strong identity as laborers. Weber makes it clear that they were transnational workers who had labored on both sides of the border. They came from regions in Mexico that had been disrupted by the expansion of capitalism since the 1880s. Because they were affected by the ups and downs of the capitalist economy, these workers had performed diverse jobs in farming, manufacturing, construction, and mining. Second, Mexican cotton workers also belonged to various networks that allowed them to create close, tight-knit communities. Weber contends that family, hometown, and social (*compadrazgo* and women) ties gave workers a sense of group identification. Social hierarchy further cemented the workers' unity. Some of the strikers had learned organizational skills as military officers during the 1910 Revolution or as foremen for haciendas.

Weber argues that because of decreasing earnings and the stark conditions under which they were forced to work, cotton workers were prepared to go on strike with or without support from a union. On September 19, seventy-eight delegates met at the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Unions' (CAWIU) headquarters to formulate the workers' demands. The delegates asked one dollar for picking one hundred pounds of cotton, the abolition of the contract labor, no recrimination against strikers, and hiring only through the union. The growers were only willing to raise wages to sixty cents per one hundred pounds, an increase of twenty cents from 1932. The workers chose to walk out of the fields rather than accept the farmers' offer.

The striking workers, according to Weber, conducted and assumed coordination of the strike themselves since CAWIU only had six organizers stationed in the valley. Mexican leaders, who emerged from recognized lines of authority within the workers, directed picketing, dealt with workers on a day-to-day basis, and or-

ganized strikers' camps. As a testament to their organizational abilities, these leaders created and administered a huge refugee camp near Corcoran which housed 3,500 strikers. By October 9, an estimated 12,000 workers were on strike in Tulare, Kings, and Kern counties. Women played a key role in maintaining the refugee camps and running the picket lines.

Increasing confrontations between strikers and farmers and their supporters occurred as the strike was prolonged, resulting in injury and death to strikers. The mounting violence finally compelled the federal government to intervene and settle the strike. The strike ended when the government threatened to cut off the workers' relief and withdraw AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Administration) payments to farmers. The workers accepted a wage increase of seventy-five cents per one hundred pounds of cotton.

Weber argues that labor activism in the San Joaquin Valley nearly died out after 1934. Farmers and the chambers of commerce succeeded in exerting pressure to restrict government assistance to farm workers to ensure a passive workforce willing to accept low wages. Moreover, the migrant stream of Mexican workers was greatly reduced due to the repatriation programs. Finally, Mexican workers were replaced with thousands of white Southern migrants. The new Anglo migrants expressed little interest in joining labor unions. They, in fact, tended to identify with farmers as a result of skin color, their belief that they were *farmers* not wage laborers and, in some cases, their conservative religion. A Pentecostal preacher exhorted cotton pickers not to go out on strike because he believed that "the Bible says we shouldn't be strikers."[11] Despite this unfavorable climate, workers organized strikes in 1938 and 1939. Weber, however, claims that the strikes floundered because the workers lacked the social networks that had been present during the 1933 strike.

The strength of Weber's book lies in its treatment of Mexican strikers as transnational workers who were unwilling to accept the harsh conditions imposed on them. These workers were agents determined to improve their lives. Weber effectively uses oral interviews to bring the strikers to life. The reader gets a sense of how the workers felt about the strike as well as their involvement in it. The problem with the interviews is the manner in which Weber uses them. Instead of providing extended quotations, Weber only gives brief excerpts. Hence, the quotations are more obtrusive than helpful. Weber also could have thrown more light on what happened to the workers who left the region after 1934. She notes that

11. Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 150.

most did not return to the San Joaquin Valley. What happened to them? How were they affected by the repatriation programs? Did they continue to work in agriculture?

Americans of Mexican Ancestry: Nationality, Identity and Immigration

In *Walls and Mirrors*, David G. Gutierrez examines the deep divisions that have historically existed among people of Mexican ancestry in the United States. He notes that there has never been agreement among these people about issues of identity, nationality, and immigration. They would ask themselves: Are we U.S. citizens or are we *"mexicanos de afuera?"* If they were U.S. citizens, what was their relationship to Mexico, their ancestral homeland, and to Mexican immigrants in the United States? Gutierrez also points out that people of Mexican ancestry were torn by their search for identity. Should they keep their ancestral Mexican culture or adopt the predominantly European American culture of the United States? Depending on how they saw themselves in relationship to the United States, Mexico, and Mexican immigrants, the people of Mexican ancestry expressed different positions on U.S. policies on Mexican immigration. In the 1970s, however, these people came to a consensus in opposing several pieces of immigration legislation designed to significantly reduce Mexican immigration to the United States.

Gutierrez believes that divisions among people of Mexican ancestry can be traced back to the nineteenth century. He seems to suggest that the people who colonized the northern Spanish territories (today, the American Southwest) were somewhat different than those of central Mexico. Apparently, the people of Texas, New Mexico, and California were more Hispanic, racially and culturally. Gutierrez argues that by the second half of the century, the Mexicans of the Southwest were developing a sense of collective identity; they saw themselves as belonging to a Mexican American community. Although the writer regards them as an emerging, distinct group, he admits that Mexican Americans largely retained their traditional Mexican culture and identified themselves as Mexicans. Likewise, to Anglo Americans, Gutierrez's "Mexican Americans" were simply not Americans but merely Mexicans.

Gutierrez claims that divisions among the people of Mexican ancestry became more apparent by the early 1900s. The thousands of Mexican immigrants caused tension between the recent arrivals (*recién llegados*) and Mexican Americans. Mexicans maintained a sense of themselves as *mexicanos de afuera* (Mexicans living out-

side of Mexico) and expressed a fervent pride in their homeland and culture. In contrast, many Mexican Americans viewed themselves as more American than Mexican. They also saw Mexican immigrants as a threat. These Mexican Americans believed that unrestricted Mexican immigration undermined their life chances by increasing economic competition and reinforcing negative, Anglo American racial and cultural stereotypes of Mexicans. Other Mexican Americans, however, were more sympathetic to the *recién llegados*. They realized that they shared many common ties with the new immigrants. Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants belonged to the same economic class, possessed a common culture, and were bound together by kinship and friendship. These Mexican Americans were keenly aware that Anglo Americans seemed to discriminate against all Mexicans whether they were U.S. citizens or not. As one elderly Mexican American told historian Albert Camarillo, "We [Mexican American and Mexican immigrants] were all poor. We were all in the same situation."[12]

Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, according to Gutierrez, established social, political, and cultural organizations that reflected their diverse cultural experiences and their identification with the United States and Mexico. Mexicans and some Mexican Americans proceeded to create organizations, like mutual aid societies, to promote Mexican culture as well as to serve the needs of the membership. They also set up labor unions or political groupings to protect the economic and political rights of Mexican workers. For instance, the National Congress of Spanish Speakers called on American society to live up to its democratic ideals and principles and give immigrants the right to enjoy the American dream.

Gutierrez suggests that some Mexican Americans chose to emphasize the American side of their identity. For example, organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Mexican American Movement (MAM), and the American GI Forum encouraged their members to fully assimilate into American society. For them, assimilation not only was a natural process but also inevitable. To protect the interests of Mexican Americans, these organizations sometimes sacrificed those of Mexican immigrants. Beginning in the 1940s, LULAC and the American GI Forum demanded the end of the Bracero Program because they believed that braceros displaced native-born Mexican American workers

12. David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5.

and lowered wages. These organizations continued to pressure the U.S. Congress to terminate the Bracero Program. Responding partly to the mainstream Mexican American organizations, Congress ended the Bracero Program in 1965. To further reduce Mexican competition for jobs, these organizations called for stricter control of the U.S.-Mexican border and supported restrictive immigration laws.

Gutierrez contends that Mexican American organizations changed their attitude towards Mexican culture and Mexican immigration in the 1970s. While these organizations still favored the assimilation of Mexican Americans into American society, they now believed it could be accomplished without giving up their ancestral culture. Gutierrez credits the Chicano Movement for the Mexican Americans' renewed pride in their Mexican roots. Gutierrez also believes that Chicano activists influenced Mexican Americans to reconsider their previous support of U.S. immigration policies. Mexican Americans came to believe that increasing attacks on undocumented immigrants by the public and elected officials threatened the civil rights of native-born Americans of Mexican descent.

In the 1970s, politicians started introducing legislation to drastically curtail undocumented Mexican immigration. Chicano organizations decided to protect the rights of undocumented aliens. CASA (Center for Autonomous Social Action), La Raza Unida Party, and the Crusade for Justice demanded that all aliens be allowed to establish legal residence in the United States. While LULAC no longer backed U.S. restrictions on Mexican immigration, the United Farm Workers (UFW) publicly endorsed anti-immigrant legislation. In 1973, CASA criticized the UFW support of the Arnet and Rodino bills; in 1974, Chicano groups issued an open letter reproaching the UFW position. Cesar Chavez initially tried to discredit the Chicano activists by arguing that they did not know anything about farm work for they were "not workers."[13] The UFW, however, soon changed its position on undocumented immigration and promised that it would advocate "amnesty for illegal workers and support efforts to obtain legal documents."[14] Gutierrez argues that the UFW's reversal of its previous support of U.S. immigration policy was triggered by its loss of significant support from Chicano organizations.

Gutierrez maintains that immigration reform legislation proposed by President Jimmy Carter compelled Chicano and mainstream Mexican American organizations to band together in opposi-

13. Ibid, 199.
14. Ibid.

tion. The Carter proposal called for legal sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented aliens. Community groups and Mexican American elected officials fought the Carter immigration reform proposal, fearing it would hurt the civil rights of Mexican Americans. This coalition believed that by stopping legislation targeted at undocumented immigrants, it was also protecting Mexican Americans from discrimination. According to Gutierrez, the coalition has survived into the 1990s. Today, U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry and Mexican immigrants face an even greater struggle to protect immigrants, legal or undocumented, from anti-immigrant campaigns conducted by xenophobic sectors of the public and conservative politicians.

In his book, Gutierrez shows how incredibly complex were the views of people of Mexican ancestry on Mexican immigration. Some Mexican Americans favored immigration, others called for more restrictive measures, while still others held mixed feelings about immigration. There were many Mexican Americans who believed that there were already too many Mexicans living in the United States and favored closing the door to Mexican immigrants. Yet, they were not prepared to keep out their own relatives, friends, and neighbors. Clearly, not even the most die-hard opponents were willing to completely shut the door on Mexican immigrants.

The weakness of Gutierrez's book lies in its contention that Mexican Americans had begun to evolve as a distinct people as early as the second half of the nineteenth century. Gutierrez implies that the settlers who resided in the Southwest before 1848 were racially and culturally different from their neighbors to the south. To show that Spanish speakers of the Southwest were forging a new identity, Gutierrez designates them "Mexican Americans." However, these Mexican Americans actually perceived themselves as *mexicanos*. As the writer well knows, the term Mexican American did not become popular until the 1920s. It was used by those people of Mexican ancestry who desired to be fully absorbed into the mainstream society. They were seeking an American identity, one that would separate them from the Mexican immigrants.

Conclusion

The books reviewed in this essay examine new areas of research in Chicano history. In *Racial Faultline*, Tomas Almaguer suggests that there already existed a racialized social structure in he nineteenth century California. One may dispute the position that he assigns to Mexican Americans had in the state's racial hierarchy but it can not be contested is that Anglo Americans were its beneficiaries. Martha

Menchaca's *The Mexican Outsiders* addresses two major themes. First, it correctly notes that Anglo Americans have deliberately ignored the history of Mexicans in Santa Paula. Second, it analyzes how the Anglo Americans' policy of "social apartness" led to decades of segregation in every sphere of life and to the political disempowerment of Chicanos.

Generally, historians tend to depict Mexican workers as defenseless victims of all-powerful agricultural corporations. Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Devra Weber demonstrate that Mexican workers although economically and politically weak were prepared to defend their rights. In *Labor and Community*, Gilbert G. Gonzalez discusses the motivations that drove citrus growers to establish permanent housing for Mexican workers. The Mexicans of Orange County's rural colonias in spite of impoverishment succeeded in re-creating much of the way of life and culture of Mexico. The 1936 Citrus Strike convinced growers that the colonias' residents were no longer reliable workers and actively campaigned to bring a new labor force—the braceros. Weber, in *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, also looks at factors that allowed Mexican workers to conduct an impressive strike in the cotton fields of the San Joaquin Valley. She claims that the strikers experiences as transnational workers coupled with tightly knit social and family networks permitted them to organize themselves effectively. Their widespread strike seriously hurt cotton growers. What most impresses Weber about the 1933 Corcoran Strike is that the strikers themselves organized and coordinated it.

David Gutierrez's book, *Walls and Mirrors*, examines the diverse views that people of Mexican ancestry in the United States have towards Mexican immigration. At the heart of these views is the manner by which these individuals see themselves and their relationship with the United States and Mexico. Gutierrez claims that what sets these people apart is their perception of their own identity. He argues that Mexican Americans were starting to forge their own identity as early as last century. However, there is little evidence to corroborate Gutierrez' contention. Some sources, in fact, indicate that Californios regarded themselves as Mexicans. Nineteenth century memoirs of Californios, which are house at the Bancroft Library, reveal that the writers considered themselves *mexicanos.* Menchaca, moreover, makes it quite clear that the Santa Paulans she studied continue to classify themselves Mexicans as late as the 1950s. Even Gonzalez, who believes that the residents of the Orange County *colonias* became highly Americanized, admits that these people retained a deep attachment to their homeland and Mexican culture.

In their efforts to treat the history of Mexican-origin Americans as part of the ethnic history of the United States, historians ignore the historical relations that these people have with Mexico and its people. It is time to examine Chicano history as a binational history, since these people have always been binational. Roger Roose, an anthropologist, maintains that future ties between the people of Mexico and Mexican-origin Americans will increase rather than wane. Modern technology in air transportation, telephone, and television is drawing these two peoples closer together. Thus, instead of viewing people of Mexican ancestry as members of a single community, historians need to consider them as members of multiple communities. These people are a part of the histories of the United States and Mexico.