

1 Legacies of Conquest

On February 2, 1848, delegates representing the governments of the Republic of Mexico and the United States met in the dusty village of Guadalupe Hidalgo on the outskirts of Mexico City to sign the treaty ending the Mexican War. After more than two months of negotiations, and after nearly two years of bloody conflict that had left more than 63,000 dead on both sides, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended what was at that time the bloodiest and costliest war in American history. With most of the terms dictated by the victorious Americans, the treaty established a new border between the two nations, provided official recognition of the United States' previous annexation of Texas, and provided for the payment by the United States of 15 million dollars to Mexico in exchange for Mexico's former northern provinces. It ceded to the United States one-third of Mexico's territory—including Texas, more than half—which now comprises all or part of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.

The treaty also forever transformed the destiny of the estimated 75,000 to 100,000 Mexicans who remained in what had become the American Southwest. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally extended the full protection of the U.S. Constitution and "all the rights of citizens" to those individuals who chose to remain in the territory north of the new international border, Americans' past actions toward the ethnic and racial minorities that composed part of their society made it unlikely that the new Mexican American minority would be afforded anything near equal rights in American society. Indeed, in the half century following the annexation of Mexico's former northern provinces, the ethnic Mexican population of the region was slowly but surely relegated to an inferior, caste-like status in the region's evolving social system. Mexicans were quickly

outnumbered by American immigrants; and, facing pervasive ethnocentrism and racial prejudice in their own homelands, they were gradually divested of both political and economic influence in all areas except northern New Mexico and south Texas (where they continued to hold large numerical majorities until the late nineteenth century). By the turn of the century most Mexican Americans found themselves in a position in society not much better than that occupied by Indians and African Americans elsewhere in the United States.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, these hardships played an important countervailing role by laying the foundation for the eventual emergence of a new sense of solidarity among Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Before annexation Mexicans on the northern frontier had been isolated from the centers of Mexican civilization and society and from one another by the region's vast expanses of mountains and deserts. However, the combination of military conquest and the subsequent racial prejudice and social subordination helped pull Mexican Americans together by providing the political and social context in which a new sense of community and common purpose would develop. Although the fruits of these first stirrings of ethnic consciousness would not be seen until late in the nineteenth century, this rising level of ethnic awareness provided the basis on which Mexican Americans would later contest their political and socioeconomic subordination in American society.

The Ambiguities of Mexican American Citizenship

Given American arrogance and disdain toward Mexicans and their culture before the Mexican War, it is almost surprising that the United States extended such lenient terms toward the defeated Mexicans. In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities and during the war itself, many Americans had argued quite seriously that the United States should annex the whole of Mexico. With jingoist newspapers such as the *New York Herald* and the *New York Sun* and ultranationalists such as John L. O'Sullivan and William Walker leading the way, the most strident advocates of American expansionism argued that it was "God's will" that the United States eventually absorb all of Mexico—and perhaps South America as well.¹

Yet advocates of the "All Mexico" position faced some formidable challenges in selling their views to American political leaders and the American public. Clearly, the most troubling of these were the problems involved in incorporating into American society the peoples who already lived in the

coveted territory. It was one thing to call for an aggressive American march to the west and to the south, but quite another to envision the potential incorporation of even larger numbers of non-white, non-English-speaking people into the United States. Given the antipathy many Americans felt toward Mexico and Mexicans, this was a particularly thorny issue.

At the height of the debate over American territorial aggrandizement in the 1840s, the issue of subject peoples would come to dominate discussion. Indeed, as historian Reginald Horsman argued in his study of racialism and Manifest Destiny, in the months preceding the outbreak of war, "the bitter dispute concerning the annexation of Mexican territory was primarily an argument not about territory but about Mexicans." "Though God might . . . guid[e] the Americans to the conquest of Mexico," Horsman observed, "He had not provided a detailed plan for American rule over Mexican people."²

Americans advanced a number of views as to what was to become of the people who might be acquired with any annexed territory. Some attempted to argue that such persons would simply melt into American society as they experienced the benefits of American civilization. For example, in presenting his rationale for America's Manifest Destiny, John L. O'Sullivan asserted that an American conquest of Mexico—particularly of Mexico's northern provinces—would be welcomed by Mexican citizens who had come to despise the arrogance and neglect they had traditionally received from their government in Mexico City. In O'Sullivan's view the Mexican residents of the northern provinces would welcome the advance of American civilization because "an irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon[s]" would bring with them "the plough and the rifle . . . schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting houses."³ A journalist advanced a similar argument in a November 1847 article in the *New York Sun*, observing that "the [Mexican] race is perfectly accustomed to being conquered, and the only new lesson we shall teach is that our victories will give liberty, safety, and prosperity to the vanquished, if they know enough to profit by the appearance of our stars." "To liberate and ennoble," the *Sun* reporter editorialized, "not to *enslave* and *debase*—is our mission."⁴

Other Americans were not nearly so optimistic about the possibility of absorbing into the American orbit hundreds of thousands, if not more, racially mixed, Spanish-speaking people. Indeed, throughout the war many Americans argued that the annexation of densely populated Mexican territory would help create a new, potentially disastrous "race problem" in the United States. Responding to word of the fall of New Mexico to General Kearny's army in 1846, the opposition *Richmond Whig* argued this point

forcefully, asserting, "We have far more to dread from the acquisition of a debased population who have been so summarily manufactured into American citizens than to hope from the extension of our territorial limits."⁵ The *Illinois State Register* made a similar point, arguing against any American attempt to assimilate a mixed race "but little removed above the negro."⁶ Not surprisingly, the firebrand racist senator from South Carolina, John C. Calhoun, added his objection to the possible incorporation into the Union of large numbers of Mexicans. Arguing that Mexicans represented a motley amalgamation of "impure races, not [even] as good as the Cherokees or Choctaws," Calhoun asked, "Can we incorporate a people so dissimilar to us in every respect—so little qualified for free and popular government—without certain destruction to our political institutions?"⁷ As the war wound down in Mexico in late 1847, most members of Congress answered Calhoun's rhetorical question in the negative. Indeed, as the American army made its final advance on Mexico City, most American political leaders seemed to have agreed with Michigan Senator Lewis Cass, who asserted, "We do not want the people of Mexico, either as citizens or subjects. All we want is a portion of territory, which they nominally hold, generally uninhabited, or, where inhabited at all, sparsely so, and with a population, which would soon recede, or identify itself with ours."⁸

With such a broad range of people voicing opposition to plans to annex all of Mexico, American expansionists were forced to temper their desires for territory. Consequently, as American forces made their final push toward Mexico City, President James K. Polk and his cabinet scaled back their territorial aspirations to demand a Rio Grande border and the annexation of New Mexico and Alta California. Despite Senator Cass's predictions about the fate of the Mexican citizens who would come with any annexed territory, however, the issue of nationality and citizenship presented American negotiators with some nettlesome problems.

It is one of the ironies of Western history that the complex diplomatic and political issues raised by the impending American annexation of Mexican territory were ultimately resolved (to the extent they could be resolved) not in the Congress or in the court of American public opinion but by a State Department bureaucrat in Mexico City operating without the official sanction of his government. Nicholas P. Trist, the chief clerk of the U.S. Department of State, had been sent to Mexico by President Polk to negotiate a draft treaty after Gen. Winfield Scott had begun his march on the Mexican capital following the fall of Veracruz in March 1847. Polk, however, soon grew disenchanted with Trist's handling of the negotiations, thinking him too lenient with the Mexicans, and in October of that year ordered his representative to break off negotiations immediately and re-

turn to Washington. Trist decided that he was close to reaching an agreement with the Mexican government, so, largely on his own initiative, he ignored Polk's dispatches and continued to negotiate.⁹

With the American army already occupying the capital, Mexican negotiators realized that buying time was about the best they could expect to achieve in the treaty negotiations. Nevertheless, from the outset the Mexican delegation insisted that the United States provide guarantees with regard to the rights of the Mexican nationals who chose to remain in the annexed territories. Indeed, according to Trist's memoirs, despite the many other pressing issues facing the Mexican delegation, "the condition of the inhabitants of the ceded or transferred territory is the topic upon which most time [was] expended" during the treaty negotiations.¹⁰ Although the Mexican government clearly was in no position to wrest significant concessions from the United States, the Mexican delegates were instructed to press the Americans on the question of the fate of Mexican citizens who remained in the conquered territories.¹¹

Mexico did not achieve all it had hoped in negotiations with the Americans, but when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was finally signed in February 1848 the Mexican delegation had achieved remarkable success in convincing the American government to accede to its essential wishes on the issue of its former citizens. Under the terms of the treaty initially agreed to by the negotiators in Mexico, Mexicans remaining in U.S. territory were to have three basic options. According to Section IX of the treaty, they could "remove" themselves south of the new international border, they could retain their Mexican citizenship in the United States with the status of permanent resident aliens by publicly announcing their intention, or, if they chose neither option within one year of the treaty's effective date, they would be considered to have "elected" to become citizens of the United States.¹²

Although Section IX subsequently was amended by the U.S. Senate, the terms of the bilateral protocol signed by representatives of both nations at Querétaro, Mexico, in May 1848 concerning Mexican nationals in the annexed territory remained essentially unchanged. Under the terms of the amended, final version of the treaty, those former citizens of Mexico who remained in American territory and chose not to retain Mexican citizenship were to be

incorporated into the Union of the United States, and admitted as soon as possible, according to the principles of the Federal Constitution, to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States. In the meantime, they shall be maintained and protected in

the enjoyment of their liberty, their property, and the civil rights now vested in them according to the Mexican laws. With respect to political rights, their condition shall be on an equality with that of the inhabitants of the other territories of the United States. . . .¹³

In theory the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the subsequent Querétaro Protocol seemed to solve the problems associated with the incorporation into the American polity of a large foreign population by extending to them rights similar to those enjoyed by other citizens of the United States. In practice, however, the newly "created" Mexican American population faced two major obstacles to the free exercise of their civil rights in American society. The more fundamental of these concerned their legal status in the United States. As Richard Griswold del Castillo points out, although the treaty seemed to extend to Mexico's former nationals in the annexed territory "all the rights of citizens" of the United States, the wording of the treaty actually left the decision as to the timing and conditions conferring citizenship to the U.S. Congress.¹⁴

Over the long run the second set of obstacles confronting Mexican Americans proved to be even more important in shaping patterns of inter-ethnic relations in the nineteenth-century Southwest. Although the treaty offered Mexican Americans at least nominal protection of their rights of person and property, it could do little to transform the biased views of Mexicans that Americans continued to entertain. Indeed, the bitterness and hatred toward Mexicans stimulated by the recent war in many ways intensified Anglo Americans' hostility toward "Mexicans"—including those who, at least in theory, had become members of American society. Horsman notes that, if anything, "The total Mexican defeat convinced the Americans that their original judgement of the Mexican race had been correct."¹⁵ The impact of these persistently negative attitudes toward Mexicans was felt by Mexican Americans throughout the annexed territories in the months and years following the end of the war, but the most dramatic manifestations of Americans' racist tendencies emerged in California and Texas.

Of course, as numerous scholars of nineteenth-century California have noted, Americans had developed negative impressions of Mexican California well before the Mexican War. In his popular adventure travelogue *Two Years before the Mast*, for example, Richard Henry Dana had painted an unflattering portrait of the Californios that strongly influenced American popular perceptions of northern Mexican society. Although Dana expressed qualified admiration of some aspects of Californio society and lifestyle, in general he dismissed Californios as "thriftless, proud, and very

much given to gaming." As for Mexican women, Dana admired their "dark beauty" but also noted that they were "but of little education . . . and none of the best morality." He was enthusiastic, however, about the territory the Mexicans inhabited. Musing over the Californios' lackadaisical development of "California's four or five hundred miles of sea-coast, . . . good harbors, . . . fine forests, . . . and herds of cattle," Dana was moved to wonder. "In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be!"¹⁶

Following California's annexation and the discovery of gold soon thereafter, Americans' expressed attitudes about Mexicans and their lands quickly lost this tone of idle speculation. Drawn to California by the discovery of gold in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in early 1848, nearly 200,000 immigrants poured into California over the next two years, reducing the Spanish-speaking population to a tiny ethnic minority virtually overnight. Among the initial immigrants to the goldfields were an estimated ten to twenty thousand Mexican prospectors from Sonora. Because they brought their expertise in precious-metal mining with them to California, they were at first welcomed by American prospectors eager to learn Mexican techniques. Once American prospectors learned these methods, however, and as pressure on the goldfields intensified, Mexican miners came to be seen as unwanted "foreign" competition. Thus, in 1849 and increasingly in the early 1850s, American prospectors forcefully expelled Mexican, Mexican American, and other Latin American "greasers" from the goldfields. In addition, responding to pressures exerted by American miners, in 1850 the California Legislature passed the so-called Foreign Miners Tax designed to discourage foreign prospectors—especially Mexicans—from gold mining. Those who persisted in the fields or refused to pay the tax were intimidated, beaten, or killed; throughout the 1850s violent crimes against Mexicans in California increased dramatically.¹⁷

In Texas, large-scale American immigration and the legacy of fierce racial animosity left by the Texas Revolution and the Mexican War stimulated a process of ethnic polarization even earlier than in California. Ironically, much of this ethnic polarization occurred as a result of the "success" of Mexico's colonization law of 1824. Originally passed in an effort to encourage immigration to the sparsely populated Texas frontier, the law soon attracted thousands of American immigrants (and their slaves). Although the new immigrants were required by law to renounce their former citizenship and become loyal citizens of the Republic of Mexico, by the early 1830s the colonization law had created an extremely unstable situation in which American immigrants probably outnumbered Mexicans in Texas by as much as ten to one. This imbalance continued after Texas was annexed by the United States. With a population estimated at somewhere between

fourteen and twenty-three thousand (no more than 17 percent of Texas's total population), by the early 1850s Mexican Americans in Texas had become a small minority of a rapidly growing population of American and European immigrants. Just as important, Mexicans had become a spatially segregated minority as well. As a result of the racial hatred inflamed by such incidents as the massacres at the Alamo and Goliad in 1836, most Mexicans had been forced out of their former strongholds in the San Antonio area and became concentrated in the southern reaches of the state between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande.¹⁸ As Texas historian Arnaldo de León noted in his work on the evolution of racial attitudes in nineteenth-century Texas, the mythology surrounding the Texas Revolution contributed to the emergence of lasting stereotypes of "Mexican depravity and violence, a theme which became pervasive once Anglos made closer contact with . . . the Hispanic population following the [Mexican] war. . . . Firebrands spoke alarmingly of savage, degenerate, half-civilized, and barbarous Mexicans committing massacres and atrocities."¹⁹

As thousands more American immigrants (a majority of whom originated in slave-holding southern states) poured into Texas after the Mexican War, such negative views of Mexicans spread throughout the state. To many of these new immigrants Mexicans represented a primitive "mongrel race," little better than the "wild" Indian tribes who still controlled the northern areas of Texas. Indeed, in the view of some American settlers in the state, Mexicans were inferior even, as Brownsville resident Oscar M. Addison put it in 1854, "to common nig[g]ers."²⁰

The Socioeconomic Impact of Annexation in California

Combined with the pervasiveness of negative American attitudes toward Mexicans, the change in sovereignty over Mexico's former northern provinces deeply affected the lives of the nearly 100,000 ethnic Mexicans who had become American citizens under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Incorporated into the United States by conquest and soon overwhelmed in most areas of the Southwest by the rapid influx of Anglo American and European immigrants, most Mexican Americans found themselves occupying an extremely tenuous position in the rapidly changing Americanized Southwest. Generally perceived and defined by their American conquerors as an inferior, backward people, the vast majority of the Mexican American population faced serious obstacles to the free enjoyment of their new status as American citizens.

The most pressing issue facing Mexican Americans in the years follow-

ing annexation was their weakened position in the changing regional economy. Despite having been guaranteed equal protection under the law by the Treaty of 1848, most Mexican Americans found that their opportunities for economic advancement in the new political economy were severely circumscribed. Indeed, within two decades of the American conquest it had become clear that, with few exceptions, Mexican Americans had been relegated to a stigmatized, subordinate position in the social and economic hierarchies.

In postwar California several developments contributed to the gradual erosion of Mexican Americans' socioeconomic position. The first of these stemmed from the massive influx of immigrants into the territory following the discovery of gold in early 1848. Most of the prospectors who entered California soon left the arduous work of the goldfields and began to settle in northern California, often on large tracts of land held by members of the Californio elite. The squatters placed intense pressure on Mexican landowners, who were attempting to hold on to their ranchos. As the mining boom subsided in the 1850s and 1860s and as Anglo American and European immigrants drifted away from the Sierra foothills, this process of displacement was replicated in the southern California "cow counties." Even a brief survey of demographic changes in California towns and cities underscores the magnitude and rapidity of these shifts. In Los Angeles, for example, the ethnic Mexican population dwindled from 82 percent of the city's population in 1850 to about 20 percent in 1880. In Santa Barbara the Mexican population dropped from 70 percent of the total in 1860 to less than 50 percent in 1870 and to 27 percent in 1880. In San Diego Mexican Americans' numbers dropped from 28 percent of the total in 1860 to only 8 percent in 1870.²¹

Mass immigration into California set in motion a series of related developments that undermined Mexican Americans' position in the state's evolving economy. As the large numbers of immigrants encroached on existing Mexican American communities, patterns of residential and social segregation began to emerge. It is important to note, as numerous scholars have, that the trend toward residential segregation in California represented a complex set of social forces. On one hand, the gradual concentration of Mexican Americans into smaller ethnic enclaves clearly reflected a combination of population pressures on Mexican neighborhoods and the desire of Anglo Americans to live apart from the lower-class "greasers" they encountered. On the other hand, however, the process of ethnic enclavement evolving in the region also involved a strong desire among Mexican Americans themselves to maintain boundaries between their communities and the *Norteamericanos*. Their decision to live in separate areas

stemmed in part from their effort to maintain some semblance of their former community life. As Griswold del Castillo argues, in some respects "the creation of . . . barrio[s] was a positive accomplishment. The barrio gave a geographic identity, a feeling of being at home, to the dispossessed and the poor. It was a place, a traditional place, that offered some security in the midst of . . . social and economic turmoil."²² And, as Albert Camarillo notes, withdrawal into segregated barrios allowed Mexican Americans to continue to function "within a closed Mexican social universe. Faced with their new-found status as a segregated minority and confronted by a hostile outside world, the Mexican community entered a phase of social change and adaptation . . . [that] ensured the continuity of Mexican society" in California.²³

The mass migration of American settlers and the emerging patterns of ethnic segregation in California were accompanied and intensified by the transplantation of a new political and legal system to Mexico's former province. Bringing with them an American tradition of elections, criminal justice, and law enforcement, American immigrants quickly imposed their system of law and government on California. Of all the changes wrought by the shift in legal systems, perhaps the most important involved land law. This issue was crucial in California and other areas of the Southwest because so much of the regional economy under Mexican rule had been based on agriculture and the raising of livestock.

Most of the clashes between the American and Mexican legal traditions derived from the problems associated with confirming Mexican land titles. An early draft of Article X of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had stipulated that "all grants of land made by the Mexican government or by the competent authorities, in territories previously appertaining to Mexico . . . shall be respected as valid, to the same extent that the same grants would be valid, if the said territories had remained within the limits of Mexico."²⁴ The U.S. Senate, however, refused to ratify this clause of the treaty. Fearing that Article X would throw the question of land titles in Texas (which, of course, had been annexed by the United States *before* the Mexican War) into a hopeless quagmire, the Senate simply deleted the offending article from the treaty. Secretary of State James Buchanan attempted to put the best face on the Senate's action by explaining to Mexico's Foreign Relations minister that Article X was "unnecessary" because, as he put it, "the present treaty provides amply and specifically in its 8th and 9th articles for the security of property of every kind belonging to Mexicans, whether acquired under Mexican grants or otherwise in the acquired territory." "The property of foreigners under our Constitution and

laws," Buchanan concluded, "will be equally secure without any Treaty stipulation."²⁵

Buchanan's assurances to the contrary notwithstanding, the change in sovereignty over Mexico's former territories raised complex questions about legal titles to land, some of which remain in dispute to the present day. It was not so much that Americans ran roughshod over the legal rights of Mexican landowners as that different legal traditions of property rights came into conflict. Under Mexican law (and Spanish law before that), procedures regulating property ownership, boundaries, and transfers were based as much on tradition and respect for authority as they were on codified, uniform statutes. For example, under Spanish and Mexican law, it was not at all uncommon to mark property boundaries with cow skulls, rocks, trees, and other such ephemeral landmarks.²⁶ Needless to say, such seemingly casual stewardship of private property was unfathomable to the notoriously litigious Americans. Nonetheless, the American Court of Land Claims set up in California in 1851 to adjudicate land-grant claims often ruled in favor of Mexican claimants.²⁷ Yet the combined pressure of the extremely high cost of legal representation, the imposition of property taxes (as opposed to the Mexican *ad valorem* system of taxing goods produced on the land), the rapid collapse of the livestock market after the Gold Rush, and the unrelenting pressure of squatters on Mexican Americans' lands ultimately spelled doom for almost all of the Californio propertied elite. By the mid-1850s in the north and the early 1870s in the south, the Californios' real estate holdings had dwindled to a tiny fraction of what they had been during the "Golden Age of the Ranchos."²⁸

Combined with the rapid erosion of Mexican Americans' economic position in the 1860s and 1870s, existing patterns of American prejudice toward Mexicans created an environment in which the annexed ethnic Mexican population in the Southwest also lost political influence. It is important to recognize here that the rate at which Mexican Americans' influence in political affairs eroded in different areas varied substantially, depending on the presence or absence of such factors as the survival of local propertied elites, the ratio of Mexican Americans to Anglo Americans, and the specific legal structures that evolved in the various states and territories. Thus, whereas Spanish-speaking propertied elites in New Mexico were able to continue in positions of political influence until well into the twentieth century, it was generally true that Mexican Americans in other areas of the Southwest steadily lost political clout following annexation.

Historians of the Mexican American experience in California have demonstrated that Mexican Americans' political disfranchisement stemmed

from the rapid demographic and economic transformation of their society after 1848. Between 1848 and the 1880s huge influxes of white immigrants, increasing Anglo domination over local economies, and a corresponding decrease in the wealth and property holdings of the former Mexican elite combined to erode Mexican Americans' influence in politics. California's constitution reiterated many of the civil guarantees extended to the Mexican population by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and Mexican Americans continued to influence local politics by electing some of their own in areas (such as Santa Barbara and Los Angeles) where they retained sizable minorities, but by the 1870s, and certainly by the 1880s, unfavorable population ratios, combined with Americans' use of gerrymandering and other forms of ethnic exclusion, gradually forced Mexican Americans out of the political arena. Consequently, by the turn of the century Mexican Americans had lost virtually all direct voice in local and state political affairs.²⁹

The dramatic decline of the Californio elite was only one part of Mexican Americans' decline in economic, social, and political status in the society that evolved under American rule. On the broadest level, Mexican Americans experienced vast structural displacement as the local economy shifted rapidly from a pastoral one, based predominantly on ranching and subsistence farming, to a capitalist one, increasingly based on commercial agriculture, trade, and later, the large-scale infrastructural development of the region. Before 1848 the vast majority of Mexican American laborers had been employed by the Mexican landholding elite in skilled and semi-skilled jobs as blacksmiths, harness and saddle makers, leather workers, vaqueros, or *trasquiladores* (sheepshearers). When the ranch economy was rapidly supplanted by the more diversified market economy introduced by American immigrants after the Gold Rush, the traditional occupational structure of the region was transformed. In the two decades after California entered the Union in 1850, Mexican American workers found most of their traditional occupations rendered obsolete.³⁰

Displaced from their former occupations, Mexican Americans were forced to seek work in a transformed labor market in which higher-paying occupations were dominated by Anglo American workers. Finding their access to skilled occupations, professions, and service jobs severely restricted, Mexican American workers were compelled either to accept semi-skilled or unskilled occupations or to enter the growing stream of migrant agricultural workers. To make matters worse, the concentration of Mexican American workers in these low-status occupations in many ways helped to reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes about "Mexicans'" native abilities, for over time Americans in the Southwest came to associate

Mexican Americans with unskilled labor. Indeed, this status became institutionalized in some ways by the emergence of an ethnic division of labor characterized by a dual wage structure, in which Mexican workers were consistently paid less than "white" workers performing the same work. By the turn of the century the dual wage system was a characteristic feature of virtually all industries employing Mexican and other ethnic workers throughout the Southwest.³¹

Developments in Texas

As in California, the demographics of post-annexation Texas played a strong role in shaping the future status of Mexican Americans in the society that evolved in the state. Although a small number of the Texas landholding elite (particularly in the border region) were able to retain some control over their property—and thus a degree of political influence—for decades following the Mexican War, Tejanos in general experienced patterns of land loss similar to those occurring elsewhere in the Southwest. As in California, most of the Mexican land grants held by Mexican American landowners were eventually confirmed in Texas courts, but high legal fees, unscrupulous lawyers, and unpredictable markets combined to displace Mexican Americans from their former lands.³² Summarizing the various factors affecting the Mexican American ranching elite in Texas, one historian notes that although "a segment of the landed Mexican elite . . . successfully commercialized, assimilated a mercantile outlook, and [thus] retained a patrimony of land and workers," the vast majority of Tejano landowners did not, "either because they failed to acquire an export-related source of capital or because they retained a complacent attitude toward merchandising." "Eventually," he continues, "taxes, drought, and disastrous fluctuations of the cattle market, the need to sink wells and improve cattle stock, and the expense of surveying and defending land titles combined to displace the 'unproductive' [Mexican American] landowner." The result was that "by 1900 the Mexican upper class would become nonexistent except in a few border enclaves."³³

Mass immigration from other parts of the United States, together with the Mexican ranching elite's loss of land, deeply influenced the structural position of Mexican American workers in the evolving regional economy. As a number of Texas scholars recently demonstrated, working-class Tejanos steadily lost economic ground in the five decades following the Mexican War. Moreover, as control over the primary source of wealth became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the new immigrants, landholding Mexican Americans experienced a corresponding loss of property. And,

again as in California, this shift in control of the local economy was accompanied by a clear trend in which Mexican Americans slipped into the lowest levels of the maturing capitalist labor market. Whereas in 1850 Mexican American workers in Texas had been fairly evenly distributed among the occupational classifications of independent ranch-farm owner-operator, skilled worker, and semiskilled and unskilled laborer, by the 1870s a disproportionate number of Mexican American workers were employed in the rapidly expanding "unspecialized labor" sector. By the turn of the century almost two-thirds of Texas-born Mexican American workers toiled in unspecialized, unskilled and semiskilled labor categories. As in other parts of the Southwest, by 1900 Mexican Americans in Texas made up part of a regional economy characterized by a clear ethnic division of labor in which they were trapped in the least-skilled and lowest-paid jobs.³⁴

The process of the political disfranchisement of Mexican Americans that accompanied these economic changes was somewhat more complex in Texas than in California. On one hand, the climate of racial enmity against Mexican Americans in Texas was generally much worse than in California. Although violence and legislative repression against Mexican Americans were not uncommon in California, in Texas racial animosities arising from the Texas Revolution of the 1830s and Mexican-American War of the 1840s had been continually reinforced in subsequent years by intermittent violence between Anglos and Mexicans along the border. Interethnic tensions were exacerbated by the Texas Rangers, who often took it upon themselves to "keep the Mexicans in their place" through intimidation and violence. As one Texas scholar notes, by the 1860s and 1870s the Texas Rangers had become a paramilitary "corps that enjoyed the tacit sanction of the white community to do to Mexicans in the name of the law what others did extra-legally."³⁵

Despite endemic racial conflict and the periodic repression of Mexicans by the Texas Rangers, however, a few "Texas Mexicans" were able to retain a degree of influence in local political affairs, particularly in areas where Mexican Americans continued to hold large numerical majorities. In towns with large Mexican populations, such as El Paso, Laredo, Brownsville, or Corpus Christi, Mexican Americans remained active in the new political order until the late nineteenth century. In other cases Mexican American political and social elites forged successful, if tenuous, coalitions with Anglo leaders that helped to perpetuate their influence until after the turn of the century.³⁶ When the railroads opened South Texas to settlement and development, however, large-scale migrations of Anglo American and European immigrants quickly changed the demographic structure—and thus the political structure—of the region. By the 1910s Anglos had achieved

political domination even in those areas that remained largely ethnically Mexican.

Anglo Texans further consolidated their growing political power in the state through various legislative means. For example, in a series of moves initially designed to exclude East Texas blacks from the franchise, Anglos also effectively constrained or eliminated many Mexican Americans from political participation. One of the most effective methods of limiting the franchise was the utilization of the so-called White Man's Primaries. Implemented in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in several Texas counties (including Bexar County, which encompassed San Antonio), White Man's Primaries limited the franchise exclusively to "qualified, white" voters—a set of criteria which allowed local whites wide latitude in determining voter eligibility. In 1923 the Texas legislature established the white primary statewide.³⁷ Another measure designed primarily to obstruct black voters, the poll tax, was enacted by the legislature in 1902. The poll tax, required of all voters except those over sixty years of age or "otherwise qualified," ranged from \$1.50 to \$1.75 per voter. Roughly equivalent to a full day's pay for black and Mexican workers, the poll tax effectively constrained thousands from participation in elections.³⁸

In those areas of Texas in which Mexican Americans constituted a vital swing vote, machine politics dominated the scene. Common in the border counties, the development of political machines reflected the need of Anglo immigrants to garner support of local Mexican elites in their attempts to gain control of local politics. As David Montejano explains in his study of South Texas society, "In the case of the Texas-Mexican border region and generally in the annexed Southwest, the ability to govern in the immediate postwar period was secured through an accommodation between the victorious Anglos and the defeated Mexican elite, with the latter [left] in command of the Mexican communities."³⁹ Building on existing patterns of paternalistic relations between the Tejano land-owning elite and the working-class Mexicans who worked for them during the Mexican era, Anglo political bosses attempted to adopt and refine traditional Mexican forms of deferential social relations in their efforts to extend control over the new political system. Allying themselves with Mexican American *patrones*, or local bosses, Anglo political bosses provided patronage and/or cash payments to these "sub-bosses" in exchange for the working-class Mexican American vote they delivered. At election time the *patrones*, after consultation with such Anglo bosses as James Wells, Archie Parr, or those associated with the infamous El Paso "Ring," would "instruct" the votes of their Mexican American constituents. In exchange for their votes, working-class Tejanos received considerations ranging from cash payments on

election day to emergency loans or other assistance during the rest of the year. These inducements helped to perpetuate existing patterns of social relations in which working-class Tejanos were tied to Mexican and Anglo bosses by bonds of mutual dependence. Thus, for many Tejanos of the border region, voting and other forms of political activity were seen less as active participation in American politics than as an almost natural extension of the same mutually beneficial transactions that had characterized Tejano society prior to the Mexican American War. As one scholar of the Texas boss system notes,

Lacking any tradition of participation in electoral politics, [Tejanos] did not view themselves as independent voters or as an aggrieved interest group with the potential power to organize and force their demands on public officials. Instead, the heritage of peonage conditioned the Hispanic workers and farmers to define their political roles in terms of political obligation. They voted for a particular candidate not because of his qualifications or campaign promises, but because they felt indebted to the candidate . . . or to their employers, who supported the machine ticket.⁴⁰

Early Manifestations of Ethnic Awareness

The military conquest, annexation, and subsequent racial prejudice and economic displacement experienced by Mexican Americans placed intense strains on the culture and style of life they had developed over two centuries of continuous residence in the Southwest. As American and other immigrants poured into the region, bringing with them their systems of government, social norms, and institutions, the resident Mexican population faced an extremely difficult set of challenges. Most of this first generation of Mexican Americans had little choice but to try to adapt and accommodate themselves to the changes confronting their society. For the majority of Mexican Americans the general climate of anti-Mexican prejudice and their own withdrawal from extensive contacts with the Anglo American interlopers served as formidable barriers to achieving even the most basic forms of integration, much less full-blown assimilation into the society of which they had become a part.

On the other hand, the intense pressures that annexation exerted on the traditional northern Mexican social order had unforeseen effects on the Mexican American population. There is no question that Mexican Americans suffered from Anglo Americans' tendency to stigmatize them by generically defining and thus, to a large degree, dismissing them as inferior "Mexicans" in what had juridically become part of the United States. At the same time, however, Americans' prejudices and discriminatory prac-

tices helped lay the foundation for the gradual emergence and development of new forms of ethnic awareness among the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest. Collective ethnic awareness developed slowly over a number of years and varied significantly in content and expression depending on local circumstances, including local economic conditions, the ratio of Anglo to Mexican residents in a given area, proximity to the border, the extent of interethnic contact, and other factors. But by the 1870s scattered evidence indicates that Mexican Americans in various locales had begun to forge an affirmative sense of themselves as an ethnic minority of a larger society. In some ways it was indeed the immense challenge of adapting to a new political and social order, combined with Mexican Americans' ongoing experience of prejudice and discrimination, that provided a basis for solidarity among a group of people who had previously had few bases of community or collective action. The experience of prejudice and discrimination helped Mexican Americans to create a self-conscious ethnic collectivity where one did not exist before.

Scholars have noted similar dynamics among a broad variety of peoples and cultures in many areas of the world. For example, in his broadly comparative work on the genesis and evolution of ethnic and/or national identities in minority populations in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, the British scholar Anthony D. Smith details the complex nature of evolving interethnic or interracial relations in different societies. Smith notes that the common process of ascription—the act of a dominant or superordinate group assigning *a priori* characteristics and labels to another group—often serves unexpected or even contradictory functions, particularly in situations where the subordinate group has been involuntarily incorporated into a new society. Smith argues that it is common for such newly created minority populations to develop a new sense of identity as a natural defense mechanism or as part of a larger “oppositional strategy” against the prejudice and discrimination shown them by the majority or dominant group. As Smith points out, the process of forging a generally accepted collective self-identity in an ethnic minority population often “is simply the converse of [discrimination’s] distancing role. Just as [discrimination based on] colour can point up dissimilarity and distance, so may it reveal similarity and proximity,” among racial or cultural minorities. Similarly, discrimination by a dominant group over a subordinate group may serve as a catalyst, encouraging members of minority populations to overcome lines of internal stratification that divided them in the past. Seeking new areas of commonality, they often “invent” a new (or renewed) sense of community in an attempt to better conditions for their group as a whole (however that group or community is ultimately defined). As Smith notes,

"This is particularly apparent where group conflicts polarise members of different colour [or cultural] communities. The need for self-defence, for organisation and leadership, in the face of threat or attack inspires a desire for some rationale for the community, some set of justifications and explanations for their need to unite and mobilise."⁴¹

Although no one has yet produced a systematic study of the development of Mexican American ethnic identity after 1848, scholars of nineteenth-century Mexican American history have provided strong indications that a process similar to that which Smith describes was surfacing in different local contexts among the recently "created" Mexican American population in California, New Mexico, and Texas. By the 1850s Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest had begun to speak of themselves as members of a Mexican American community, or, more commonly, as members of a broader linguistic/cultural community that was distinct from the North Americans. More importantly, Mexican Americans in communities across the region had taken the first steps toward mobilizing and organizing themselves based on this nascent sense of collective identity.

This is not to assert, however, that Mexican Americans responded uniformly to the changes wrought by annexation. On the contrary, to achieve any level of collective ethnic awareness or solidarity, Mexican Americans first had to contend with the internal class, regional, and other differences that traditionally divided the Mexican population of the north. As David Weber, Ramón A. Gutiérrez, and other Southwest historians have argued, in the quarter century before annexation, many, if not most, Spanish-speaking residents of Mexico's northern provinces did not even identify themselves as Mexicans and instead probably thought of themselves first as Nuevomexicanos, Tejanos, or Californios. As Weber puts it, "Loyalty to one's locality, one's *patria chica* [little nation, or locale], frequently took precedence over loyalty to the patria, or nation as a whole."⁴²

Given their long isolation on the fringes of the Mexican nation, these local attachments are hardly surprising. Considering themselves *hijos del país* (sons of the country), Mexicans in the various northern centers of settlement had driven deep roots into the regions where their families had lived for generations. Indeed, regional loyalties were so strong that many natives of the far-flung northern provinces—particularly members of the local elites—tended to view Mexican colonial administrators, soldiers, settlers, and sojourners as *extranjeros* (foreigners or outsiders)—despite the fact that both Norteños and Mexicans from Mexico were technically Mexicans. In fact, during the early Mexican Republic the Norteños' petulant attitude toward the patria was so strong that revolts periodically broke out against Mexican authority in Alta California, Nuevo Mexico, and Tejas.

Weber notes that in California "even casual visitors . . . noted the hostility and 'deep hatred' that the Californios held toward Mexicans from 'la otra banda,' or 'other shore' as Californios termed central Mexico."⁴³

For their part, Mexicans who visited the northern provinces were also aware of the social distance that had grown between the Norteños and Mexicans from the fatherland. This was clear in the observations made by Lt. José María Sánchez, an artillery officer who traveled with Inspector General Manuel Mier y Terán on his tour of Texas in 1828. Commenting on the Mexican residents of Nacogdoches, Texas, Sánchez noted with regret that

The Mexicans that live here are very humble people, and perhaps their intentions are good, but because of their education and environment they are ignorant not only of the customs of our great cities, but even of the occurrences of our Revolution, excepting a few persons who have heard about them. Accustomed to the continued trade with the North Americans, they have adopted their customs and habits, and one may say truly that they are not Mexicans except by birth, for they even speak Spanish with marked incorrectness.⁴⁴

Society in nineteenth-century northwestern Mexico was stratified in ways that militated against the development of a strong sense of ethnic or cultural community. It was hierarchically organized into a social pyramid ordered by a combination of factors, including accumulated wealth and claimed lines of descent. By 1800 Hispanic society in the north was dominated by a small minority of wealthy landowners who claimed descent from the original Spanish settlers of New Spain. The exact shape of the social pyramid varied from region to region in the northern provinces, but in general Hispanic society in the early nineteenth century was divided into three fairly distinct strata. At the bottom were the Christianized or, more accurately, detribalized Indians (known as *genízaros* in New Mexico and neophytes in California) who worked for large landowners in a status resembling indentured servitude or for the many Catholic missions that dotted the northern frontier. Smallholder mestizos occupied the next tier. Although most people in this stratum, like the Christianized Indians, toiled at subsistence agriculture, ranch labor, artisanal crafts, and, toward the end of the Mexican period, as paid day laborers, the mestizos could—and did—claim at least some Spanish blood and thus were considered to be *gente de razón* (people of reason) as opposed to the savage Indians, who were deemed *gente sin razón* (people without reason). The final and smallest stratum of Hispanic frontier society consisted of the large landowners,

government and military administrators, merchants, and in some cases, Catholic church officials who dominated the political economy. As Gutiérrez noted in his richly detailed work on the colonial and Mexican-era north, the landed aristocracy maintained and extended its dominance of northern society through a complex system of claimed European descent, the accumulation of wealth, and the strict supervision of marriage and women's sexuality.⁴⁵

Many of the lines of internal differentiation that had evolved in northwestern Mexico persisted after the American conquest. As Gutiérrez and others have argued, although Anglo Americans may have seen the emerging patterns of ethnic relations in the Southwest as a question concerning simple categorical differences between Americans, Mexicans, and Indians, Mexican Americans continued to recognize important status distinctions among themselves, which they attempted to maintain even after the change in sovereignty. Indeed, Mexican Americans' attempts to grapple with the social status issues raised by their incorporation into American society closely mirrored the lines of internal stratification that traditionally had divided them.

Take, for example, the different ways the various strata of Mexican society reacted to the American takeover and to Americans' subsequent tendency to view Mexicans simply as "Mexicans." Upper-class Mexican Americans contested Anglo Americans' efforts to classify (and thus to denigrate) them as Mexicans by denying and/or reconstructing their ethnic heritage. Traditionally considering themselves to be of inherently higher status than the Mexican working masses by virtue of their class standing and their *calidad* and their sense of *limpieza de sangre* (that is, their social "quality" based on their supposed "pure" European blood), members of the Californio, Tejano, and Nuevomexicano elite tried to persuade incoming American immigrants to recognize and acknowledge these status distinctions. In the early part of the nineteenth century this strategy worked because many Americans found it in their interest to forge economic, political, and, in many cases, matrimonial alliances with members of the existing Spanish-speaking elite. Seeking to maximize their influence with the extant indigenous elite, the first American immigrants to the region tended to acknowledge the status distinctions the elite tried so hard to maintain between themselves and the Mexican working class.⁴⁶

After annexation these status distinctions remained crucial to the Spanish-speaking elite's attempts to insulate themselves from the stigma associated with the Mexican label. By referring to themselves as Spanish in their dealings with Anglo Americans, members of the indigenous elite hoped to escape the prejudice exhibited toward Mexicans in the Southwest.

They accomplished this, in part, by meticulously laying the foundation for what Carey McWilliams wryly termed the "Spanish fantasy heritage" of the Southwest. Existing historical evidence demonstrates that only a tiny fraction of the original Hispanic colonists of the Southwest could legitimately claim pure Spanish descent, the overwhelming majority being descended from Mexico's vast mestizo population. Nevertheless, many of the elite families insisted on referring to themselves as *españoles*, or Spaniards, to distance themselves from what they defined as the *gente corriente*, the common or vulgar working-class people. As the position of the ethnic Mexican population eroded in subsequent years, the descendants of the former elite *gente de razón* families clung to such status distinctions even more tenaciously. By the last decades of the nineteenth century their efforts in this direction had become almost comical. As McWilliams noted of this trend in California, "By a definition provided by the *Californios* themselves, [a Mexican American] who achieves success in the borderlands is 'Spanish,' one who doesn't is 'Mexican'."⁴⁷

This strategy of denying mestizo descent was not the only option available to Mexican Americans as they attempted to deal with the many contradictions inherent in being Mexican in what had become an American society. Members of the working-class majority also grappled with the ambiguities inherent in their new status as ethnic Americans. Consequently, some began to articulate a sense of identity that represented a conscious attempt to meld their Mexican/Spanish colonial cultural heritage with their new political status as American citizens. Although it is impossible to recreate a representative cross-section of Mexican American public opinion on the issue of ethnic or community identity in the decades following annexation, scattered evidence does indicate that soon after the Mexican cession Mexican Americans were actively engaged in a process of assessing their new position in American society. As Griswold del Castillo notes in his study of the Los Angeles Mexican community, local attachments and loyalties continued to exert a strong influence on the social identity of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, but the transfer of sovereignty over their homelands stimulated a strong tendency "to move from particular [local] allegiances toward a more general group solidarity."⁴⁸

Much of the impetus for moving toward a more inclusive sense of community stemmed from Mexican Americans' need to assert a positive sense of "peoplehood" in the face of the Anglo Americans' attempts to denigrate them as racial and cultural inferiors. One strategy, as we have seen, involved withdrawal into the confines of the barrios. Painfully aware of how Americans felt about them, many working-class Mexican Americans simply attempted to avoid unnecessary contact with the American immi-

grants. More important, in a weak position to alter their ethnic heritage by constructing a myth of upper-class European descent, they took solace instead in observing their own variants of Mexican culture in the relative privacy of their neighborhoods or in the more isolated rural areas in Texas, northern New Mexico, and southern Colorado that the Americans had not yet overrun. By isolating themselves in segregated barrios, colonias, and rural *rancherías*, working-class Mexican Americans could, and largely did, continue to live their lives in a manner similar to that which existed prior to annexation. Although there is no question that life in their impoverished neighborhoods reflected Mexican Americans' eroding economic and social standing, segregation in some ways contributed to a process of community formation, or reformation, rather than the dissolution or fading away of Mexican American communities that many Americans had expected or hoped for.

To working-class Mexican Americans urban barrios and rural colonias functioned as sanctuaries from the bewildering changes occurring around them. Anglos may have gained control of the political and economic lifeblood of the Southwest, but within the boundaries of their own neighborhoods Mexican Americans protected many of their cultural practices and rituals. In their own enclaves Mexican Americans continued to converse in Spanish, observed Roman Catholic rituals and celebrations, and entertained themselves in the style to which they had grown accustomed, all largely without interference from the *Norteamericanos*. In addition, working-class Mexican Americans courted, raised families, and perpetuated their traditional practice of *compadrazgo*—the system of ritual godparent sponsorship which bound them to one another through complex fictive kinship networks—without interference from the American immigrants who were otherwise transforming their society.⁴⁹

Some Mexican Americans developed other, more activist, methods of contesting their subordination in the new society of the Southwest. One way they contested their ascribed inferior ethnic status was to form their own voluntary organizations. One of the earliest and most ubiquitous forms of association among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants was the *mutualista*, or mutual-aid association. Like mutual-assistance and fraternal associations formed by other immigrant groups in the United States, Mexican *mutualistas* provided the working class and poor with a broad range of benefits and services they otherwise could not afford. By pooling their limited resources, members provided themselves with a number of benefits and services including funeral, disability, and other types of insurance, credit, and cultural events and entertainment.⁵⁰ Orig-

inating in Mexico during the early nineteenth century, by the 1870s similar organizations had been established throughout Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest.

Other Mexican Americans employed more extreme measures to contest challenges to their dignity and to the general process of social subordination they experienced. As several social historians have demonstrated, when local conditions became intolerable Mexican Americans across the Southwest resorted to violence and/or acts of social banditry in their efforts, as one scholar put it, to retain "some measure of self-determination in the face of an increasingly oppressive new regime."⁵¹

Over the long run, however, the development among Mexican Americans of a sense of themselves *as* Mexican Americans provided a far more important defense against discriminatory practices than did armed resistance or the formation of formal voluntary organizations. One of the clearest reflections of the evolution of this new sense of collective identity is seen in the gradual changes in the various terms Mexican Americans used to describe themselves. As we have seen, prior to extensive American penetration into northwestern Mexico in the early nineteenth century, residents of that area identified primarily with their localities rather than with the Republic of Mexico. After the Mexican War, however, the common experience of military defeat, widespread discrimination, and increasing poverty created conditions under which many Mexicans in the annexed territories began, in effect, to turn inward. Recognizing that they clearly were not accepted as Americans, many logically began to think of themselves as Mexicanos or as members of a larger, pan-Hispanic community of *La Raza* (the race or the people).

Although *La Raza* is a term that today has come to mean the entire mestizo population of greater Latin America, in the last third of the nineteenth century Mexican Americans often employed the term to describe the Mexican "race" on both sides of the new border. Use of group terms such as *La Raza* varied widely from region to region, but given the historical heterogeneity of the Spanish-speaking population the use of such terminology by Mexican Americans to describe campaigns of protest and resistance in Texas, New Mexico, and California is remarkable. In California, for example, Mexican Americans ranging from Francisco P. Ramírez, editor and publisher of the Los Angeles Spanish-language weekly *El Clamor Público*, to the social bandit Tiburcio Vásquez, advocated the creation of a new sense of ethnic solidarity among members of what the newspaper variously described as *la población Mexicana* (the Mexican population [of California]), *nuestros compatriotas* (our compatriots), *nuestra población California y*

Mexicana (our population of [Mexican] Californians and Mexicans [from Mexico]), *la raza española* (the Hispanic race or people), or *nuestra raza* (our people).⁵²

These terms were popularized by the rapid proliferation of Spanish-language newspapers and the fraternal, mutual-aid, and Mexican patriotic associations that sprang up in the Southwest after annexation. Their use marked the birth of an oppositional strategy that acknowledged the common oppression Mexican Americans suffered in American society while offering an alternative, positive label that countered the stigmatized status many Americans sought to impose on Mexicans. As Griswold del Castillo describes the emergence of the term in California,

The increasing use of "La Raza" as a generic term in the Spanish-language press was evidence of a new kind of ethnic consciousness. . . . La Raza connoted racial, spiritual, and blood ties with the Latin American people, particularly with Mexico. And La Raza emerged as the single most important symbol of ethnic pride and identification. There were many ways of using this term, depending on the context. "La Raza Mexicana," "La Raza Hispano-Americana," "La Raza Española," and "La Raza Latina" were all used to convey a sense of the racial, class, and national variety within the Spanish-speaking community. But in general the use of "La Raza" implied membership in a cultural tradition that was separate from the . . . "norteamericanos."⁵³

According to de León and other historians of nineteenth-century Texas, an even more intense process of ethnic redefinition and boundary marking occurred among Tejanos after 1848. With the vast majority of the surviving Mexican American population pushed into ethnic enclaves hugging the new border after the Mexican War, the demarcation between Anglo and Mexican was more clearly marked in Texas than anywhere else in the Southwest. Consequently, in the Nueces Strip—the territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande—and in other communities along the Rio Grande where Mexicans Americans and Mexican sojourners predominated, Mexican Americans doggedly retained a strong sense of Mexican identity for decades following their political incorporation into the United States. Although Tejanos suffered from the effects of discrimination and economic subordination as much, if not more, than did Mexican Americans in other parts of the Southwest, the Tejanos, as de León notes, "continued their own cultural patterns, making bearable their life as poor and marginal people." Despite their incorporation into American society and in many ways because of their annexation into a foreign nation, most Mexican

Americans in nineteenth-century Texas continued, as de León notes, to emphasize what they called *lo mexicano* (a sense of Mexicanness) as the cornerstone of their collective identity. Indeed, as de León and other Texas historians have argued, “‘*lo mexicano*’ prevailed over ‘*lo americano*’ [a sense of Americanness], manifested in the population predominance of Mexicans, in the use of the Spanish language and Mexican work patterns, in the persistence of Mexican social traditions, and in the influence, however subtle, that the northern states of Mexico had on the area.” In short, although Mexican Americans in the border region of Texas were no longer citizens of Mexico, Texas largely remained “a place where Tejanos could move about as Mexicans instead of Americans, if they had to.”⁵⁴

The success of Mexican Americans in maintaining a distinctive culture in the Southwest did not lie in the fact that they violently or even overtly resisted Anglo Americans’ steady encroachments on their way of life. Rather, the ultimate political and social significance of the perpetuation of distinct Mexican American communities throughout the Southwest lay in the fact that Mexican Americans were able to survive and persist as an ethnically distinct people despite the change in political sovereignty over their homeland. In technical, political terms, although Mexican Americans, by virtue of their new status as American citizens, were no longer Mexicans, American racism and Mexican Americans’ de facto subordinate status in the new social order encouraged them to consider themselves Mexicans in a way they never had before.

The irony in this situation was that Mexican Americans confounded Anglo Americans’ expectations in at least two ways. In developing a new sense of community based both on a common Mexican cultural heritage and the common experience of racial prejudice in the United States, Mexican Americans were able to transform Anglo Americans’ efforts to stigmatize them as racial inferiors into a positive strategy of self-affirmation as Mexicans in American society. At the same time, Mexican Americans’ success in generating such new bases for solidarity went a long way toward guaranteeing the survival and growth of a distinct, if syncretic, variant of Mexican culture in what had become part of the United States. This was the last thing the proponents of Manifest Destiny had in mind when they had predicted the eventual fading away of the region’s ethnic Mexican population.

The evolution of a society bifurcated in this manner spoke to a fundamental contradiction with which most Americans had yet to come to grips—a contradiction that would ultimately raise serious questions about the nature of the society the Americans had transplanted in the Southwest.

For in formally granting the ethnic Mexican population in the Southwest all the rights of American citizens in 1848, and yet denying them the possibility of exercising those rights, Americans planted the seeds of continuing ethnic discord in the region. As the ethnic Mexican population suddenly exploded in the last decades of the century due to the large numbers of immigrants that began to pour into the region from Mexico, the contradiction between the promise of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the American Constitution and the reality of American interracial and inter-ethnic relations in the Southwest would take on even greater significance.