

THE DIFFICULT ASCENCIÓN FROM COMMON STRUGGLES TO AN  
UNCOMMON UNDERSTANDING: A STUDY OF THE COMPLEX  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEXICANS AND MEXICAN AMERICANS

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by

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In memory of my father,  
Major Dennis R. Kuehler

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## **ABSTRACT**

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**SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: JAIME ARMIN MEJÍA, PH.D.**

This study grew from two factors: a marriage between the primary investigator to a Mexicano and from a Chicana/o Narrative course. The first factor contributed to this study because the primary investigator, a fair-haired, blue-eyed Anglo female, had not previously been the recipient of racial prejudice until she married a man of color. This experience caused her to become more observant of interracial relations. This scrutiny exposed the complex relations that existed among Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

This awareness only increased when this couple had a Mexican American child. But her interest in Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano writers preceded the birth of their daughter. Since she had previously taken a Chicana/o Narrative she was able to convert her reflections on racial prejudice into ideas which in turn led to further questions. In an attempt to answer these questions, she has examined many different perspectives, as they relate to the complex relations among Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Each chapter discusses the struggles of the past and today that affect each group. By looking at social scientific studies, she discovers how cultural traditions, social and political privilege, the racial order, and economic hardships contribute to these struggles. She examines how these factors impact the identity of people from each group and how these identities relate to one another. She also examines Mexican and Mexican American literary works of literature which, by treating identity, enable a better understanding of the challenges in creating a cross-cultural identity.

# I

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans, in the past as well as today, is both difficult to understand and complicated. Both groups widely vary in their own ways with identity, while at the same time; each competes for positions in the social hierarchy that exists on both sides of the border. However, both in the past and present, Mexicans and Mexican Americans have been considered the same, lumped together by Anglo Americans as the Mexican race, if you will. But each group of “Mexican” people is different because the ancestry of each differs. Some Mexicans and Mexican Americans are descendants of the Spanish, and some have indigenous ancestry, but many are Mestizo – a mix of both. One must also consider the size of Mexico and that Mexicans originate from many regions that differ greatly, from one ethnic group to another. These differences also often lead to complicating and problematizing how they are viewed and how they view each other.

In the past, whether Anglos were ignorant, complacent, or both, about ethnic and cultural identity, they have too often assumed that all who appear Mexican are Mexican, with no difference among them whatsoever. This confusion, on the part of Anglos, has existed since before Mexico ceded more than half its land as a US territory after the Mexican-American War with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Because of the Anglos’ careless disregard for the complicated ethnic identity of Mexicans

and Mexican Americans, it is not surprising that Anglos continue to see no difference among Mexicans, even though some became American citizens and hence Mexican Americans, and with some going as far as identifying themselves as Chicanos/as. I deliberately place the confusion on the part of Anglos here at the beginning of this thesis to foreground that Mexicans have always had Anglos conducting this kind of racialized profiling. The Mexicans on their own part, however, knew very well who they were and where they came from, and were adamant about their distinctive cultural and ethnic differences among each other, before and after the ceding of more than half of their country to the U.S.

The differences among Mexicans and Mexican Americans, back then and today, are therefore often contingent on geography and culture, on where they are from and how they live. In the ethnographic study, *Border Identifications: Narratives of Religion, Gender, and Class on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (2005), Pablo Vila discusses how the perspectives of both Mexicans and Mexican Americans living along the border depend on the region from where they originate. He does not limit his discussion to the views that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have of each other but extends his analysis to how Mexicans view other Mexicans from different regions. In doing so, he reveals a social hierarchy where Mexicans of rural areas (from the south and central regions of Mexico) are positioned at the low end of the social scale, and individuals who are from the north, from the border regions of Mexico, are positioned higher on this borderlands social scale.

David Gutiérrez's study, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1995), reinforces Vila's study by discussing early Mexican American views about Mexicans. Gutiérrez states that Mexican Americans

residing in the northern part of the Mexican territory, ceded under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, have often viewed themselves as a superior race due to their Spanish blood; in fact, some have denied their Mexican heritage all together. According to Laura Gómez, author of *Manifest Destinies: The Making of Mexican Americans* (2007), some Mexican Americans after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, claimed a degree of “whiteness” (97).

As the Mexican region of origin seems a predominant factor in how Mexican people create perspectives about Mexicans and Mexican Americans, how does it affect the roots of the struggle for identity shared by Mexicans and Mexican Americans? Factors such as cultural tradition, social and political privilege, the racial order, and economic hardship, as it relates to immigration, have all acted as barriers standing between Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the past and continue to do so in the present.

This thesis explores the perspectives of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Anglos independently, along a continuum drawn along cultural, political, and historical lines, even though their lives have long been intertwined. In addition, I address and analyze fictional literature in order to evaluate how these literary works reflect these perspectives and how college students, no matter the race or country of origin, might identify with the subjects found in the literary works of both Mexican and Mexican American authors.

The fictional works included in this study can clearly serve as effective teaching tools for understanding the relationships among Mexicans and Mexican Americans because all of the authors discuss historically-based struggles. For instance, Octavio

Paz's compilation, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, includes his well-known work "The Labyrinth of Solitude" as well some of his other notable essays. This collection of personal essays reveals a notable Mexican perspective on the differences between Mexico and the United States and the people of these two countries. Tomás Rivera's short novel, *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, chronologically follows from Paz's work because, even though it was written in the 1970s, it addresses the Mexican American perspective on issues that were also discussed by Paz in the 1950's. Rivera focuses on the struggles of migrant farmworkers during the early 1950s, of both Mexican and Mexican American, and the identities that form due to such struggles. *Bless Me, Ultima*, a novel by Rudolfo Anaya, also discusses identity but in addition confronts issues such as racial prejudice and segregation. *Pilgrims in Aztlán* a novel by Miguel Méndez, largely set during the Vietnam War era, explores the social relationship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans and also discloses the controversy of immigration. The autobiographical novel, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta provides a truly visual account of the Chicano movement, while discussing racism, poverty, and oppression, as it affects Mexican Americans. And finally *The Crystal Frontier*, a collection of contemporary short stories by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, addresses the Mexican American's abandonment of their culture of origin and exposes the exploitation of the Mexican laborer due to "American" capitalism.

Before modern day issues concerning the relation between Mexicans and Mexican Americans can be addressed, a history leading up to how these issues have become significant today must also be a focus, as it should be with any study investigating the relations between these two groups. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, specifically

Article X or the deletion thereof, is an important point of interest because the United States used it as a medium for diplomatic and political trickery. The Mexican government desired to include this particular article because it enforced that the validity of land grants, pre-established in the ceded territory, would be maintained and honored under the sovereignty of the United States. Articles VIII and IX protected the property and civil rights of Mexicans who chose to remain in the ceded territory as Mexican Americans. Specifically, Article VIII states that any Mexican owning land in the ceded territory would be able to maintain residence on their land or, if they so desired, could sell it without penalty of tax or any other charge. Also, Article VIII included statements about citizenship, to the effect that if Mexicans desired to remain Mexican citizens, they would have to decide before the end of the year following the signing of the treaty; otherwise, they would become citizens of the United States by default. Article IX takes the issue of citizenship even further and addresses the fact that people remaining in the ceded territory would give up their Mexican citizenship and embrace their new sovereign as citizens of the United States. As a result, they would possess the political and civil rights equal to those who already live as citizens in the U.S., rights such as liberty, the right to property ownership, and other civil rights, not excluding political 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights and religious freedom.

When the treaty was ratified on March 10, 1848, the U.S. deleted Article X guaranteeing the protection of Mexican land grants. This deletion further enabled the United States government, through highly questionable means, to take possession of land grants that had been previously established by the Spanish. As a result, what property the former Mexicans owned, due to Spanish land grants, was not protected. Even though

their property rights were protected by Article VIII, the deletion of Article X trumped these rights if the land was acquired through a Spanish land grant. The fact that the United States chose not to play this card until fifty years after the signing of the treaty was deliberate. By allowing the Mexican American elite to maintain its political and social status as landowners, the U.S. government ensured less resistance when taking the territory and instead received cooperation from the former Mexican elites.

By recognizing the Mexican American elite, the newly arrived Anglo American settlers in the southwest brought the subject of race to the table. As mentioned before, the elite considered themselves to have Spanish blood; Gómez in *Manifest Destinies: The Making of Mexican Americans* states that the “one drop” rule guaranteed a degree of “whiteness.” As members of the white race and as landowners, the elite Spanish Mexican land owners received full political privileges as citizens of the United States. This in itself is a partial cause for the animosity among Mexicans and Mexican Americans because claiming to be white was traitorous to their indigenous brethren. Gómez mentions that the Mexican American elite’s claim to “whiteness” in New Mexico enabled them to gain “the upper hand over non-white groups lower on the racial hierarchy, including Pueblo Indians, free and enslaved blacks, and nomadic Indians” (113). This claim to “whiteness” was a ruse to help ease their assimilation into the newly colonized territory.

Before the ceded territories gained statehood, some Mexican Americans in New Mexico took racial hierarchy a step further by holding Indian slaves. Because slave-holding was established during the Spanish period as a status symbol, the newly created Mexican American elite became hesitant about letting the practice go. It helped ensure their position in society even after they began to lose their lands. Gómez also suggests

that slaveholding was obviously “an effort to legitimize their ever-tenuous claim to whiteness” (112). The racial order still held great importance even after the territories entered as states. It also played a significant part in what would cause the animosity between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. But Indian slavery is not only a “site for examining conflict ... between Indian slaves and their Mexican American masters” (108); it also reveals the slippery intentions of the Anglos. Since Mexican Americans still maintained their Indian slaves shortly after the Civil War, Anglos used their position on the abolition of slavery as a tool to “further entrench American hegemony against the interests of Mexican American elites” (108). Gómez says it well when she states that “the war against Indian slavery [was] a political war against the Mexican American elites” (108).

Gómez makes it quite clear that the Mexican Americans in the ceded territory of New Mexico were as secure of their position in society, while still identifying themselves as Mexicans just like before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed. Gutiérrez confirms this claim in *Walls and Mirrors* when discussing the denial of any indigenous roots by many Mexican Americans. Some Mexican Americans in the new U.S. territory considered themselves “Nuevomexicanos, Tejanos, or Californios” (Gutiérrez 30) rather than, as Mexican. This point is emphasized when Gutiérrez quotes Southwest historian David Weber: “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” (30). Now, this loyalty to their locale was an attempt, on the part of the Mexican American elite, not only to differentiate themselves from others in the entire ceded territory but also from a Mexican identity, their ethnic cultural identity.

Both Gómez and Gutiérrez speak of region because they are both addressing inhabitants of what was once northern Mexican territory. Their emphasis on region goes together nicely with Vila's claim, in *Border Identifications*, that geography in more contemporary times plays an important part in how Mexicans relate to one another and to Mexican Americans. In fact, he states that there is a utopian idea that everything improves in Mexico the farther north and closer to the U.S./Mexico border one travels, with the U.S. being the ultimate utopian destination. Those residing along the Mexican side of the border, specifically in Juarez, believe this notion. The narratives in Vila's ethnographic study allude to the fact that this idea of the importance (or lack of importance) of the location of one's origins causes many to immigrate to the U.S. For example, a respondent in Vila's study uses the metaphor of a ladder to describe a utopian journey, where the United States is placed at the top and Mexico at the bottom. With this metaphor, the interviewee imagines herself somewhere better, geographically/economically/socially, "somewhere better than Mexico" (188). The perspectives of these narratives not only point to the animosity that exists among Mexicans of different regions, as it relates to a social hierarchy, but also to the animosity between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants on the U.S. side of the border.

Historically and currently, immigration has also clearly fueled the difficult and often acrimonious relationship of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Because the early Mexican American elites' social and political privileges were historically dependent on their position as landowners, their identity was disturbed when the Anglos took their land. As Gómez states in *Manifest Destinies*, the case concerning the San Miguel del Vado Spanish land grant is a prime example of how the federal government did not follow

through with their promise to honor the property rights of the newly created Mexican American citizens living in the ceded territory. This denial of land rights was politically premeditated on the part of the U.S. government early on through the deletion of Article X from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. The government's intention was to lay the groundwork so that at a later time, cases such as these could be litigated in favor of the U.S. government.

In this case, under the sovereignty of Spain, 310,000 acres were granted to fifty-two different families as a communal land grant. The idea was that each family would have a few personal acres for subsistence farming and that the remainder of the land would be used for sheep grazing and timber. Originally, the case was decided in favor of the Mexican Americans, as the grant was confirmed as a collective land grant. But when this decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the ruling was reversed, and the court only confirmed the individual land grants, totaling 5000 acres, not individually but combined. The Supreme Court read the case as if all communal lands were to be retained by the sovereign, with the U.S. as the current sovereign of the ceded territory. This ruling was not an isolated case but an example of the kind of skullduggery the US government used to displace many money-poor but landed Mexican Americans of their land.

There were other means by which Mexican Americans lost their lands. In Texas, well-established Texas landowners like Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy took advantage of the misfortune of Mexican Americans during the difficult economic periods of the late 1800s and early 1900s. King and Kenedy not only bought land from Mexican American landowners but also from Anglos. The difference was that Anglo landowners did not limit their land sales to bust times as Mexican Americans did as Anglo land sales often

fluctuated with the market. However Mexican Americans were much more psychologically attached to their land, as it was not just a material investment but rather was part of them as well as a means for survival. According to David Montejano, author of *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, the Anglos' "market situation [for land sales] was tied to market cycles independent of the cattle industry. In contrast, Mexican landowners, with ranching as their sole or primary livelihood, were highly sensitive to cattle market fluctuations" (70). As a consequence, many Mexican Americans lost their land, and without their lands to sustain them, Texas Mexicans were required to find work as laborers. As a result, they were eventually forced into a competitive job market, competing with Mexican immigrants.

This competition for labor made immigration a volatile issue for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Even though Mexican Americans embraced some of the cultural factors ensuing from immigration, like the rejuvenation of their culture, language, and traditions, Mexican immigration also threatened their livelihood as well as that of the Mexicans. Large-scale immigration into the U.S., during the 1920s, resulting from the Mexican Revolution, caused Mexican Americans and Mexicans to compete for "jobs, housing, and access to social services" (Gutiérrez 66). In addition and because of the expansiveness of Mexico's historical circumstances, culture, language, and tradition differed, depending on the region of origin. As a result, the variety of Mexican cultures existing in the U.S. interfered with the harmony they had the potential of sharing. The combination of these factors "transformed southwestern ethnic politics over the next half century" (65).

According to Gutiérrez, one faction that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was especially vocal about the negative effects of immigration on Mexican Americans in Texas was the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Organized in Texas by a group of Mexican Americans in 1929, they had the intent of “Americanizing” themselves as well as their fellow brothers and sisters. However, the organization excluded all Mexicans without U.S. citizenship. As understood by Gutiérrez, the organization’s objective mirrored that of the NAACP where appropriate goals would help “lift them to civilization” (77). Such goals for LULAC included the desegregation of schools, increased voter registration, and the development of a strong resistance to racial discrimination, as applied to Mexican Americans. In restricting membership to American citizens only, LULAC isolated Mexican immigrants, even those who considered the U.S. their home. Mexican Americans who created a community for themselves by joining organizations such as LULAC began to form a new identity, but in the process, turned their backs on those possessing a common ethnic culture, further agitating the pre-existent bitterness and finding themselves caught between two cultures.



Fig.1 Depiction of the Zootsuit Riots

Unsure of their cultural identity, some Mexican American youths, initially in El Paso, Texas, during the late 1920s and early 1930s began to form “pachuco” gangs in order to define and better understand themselves. In *Walls and Mirrors*, Gutiérrez shows

how second-generation youths formed together as pachucos, in rebellion against “the world of their parents and the American mainstream” (123). In an effort to become their own people, pachucos created a unique language for themselves, a fusion of Spanish and English, as well a certain style of dress - the Zoot Suit. Pachucos were simply rebellious youth until they were associated with the “Sleepy Lagoon Incident of 1942 and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943” (124), with both incidents being violent. As a result, pachucos drew the attention of both Mexican and Mexican American communities as well as of Anglo communities. For the Anglos these violent incidents justified their stereotypes of Mexicans as a violent people. The Anglos’ categorization of all peoples of Mexican descent, a term Douglas Massey uses in his sociological work, *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*, of all Mexican Americans and Mexicans as Mexicans further agitated an already turbulent relationship.

The Zoot Suiters still represent a popular topic among Chicano authors, used in an effort to bring a resistant cultural identity to the surface. Chicano literature usually revolves around identity struggles, and rightfully so, as the term Chicano was created and adopted in an effort to define a displaced people. Based on Massey’s definition, the term Chicano refers to Mexican immigrant workers, in the agricultural industry, during the Dust Bowl years who were forced out of jobs by “internal refugees” (123). They consequently moved into barrios, and their children attended segregated schools. As a result, they “were transformed from aspiring immigrants into a self-conscious domestic minority, and increasingly they called themselves not Mexicans but Chicanos” (123). This definition can be applied today to both Mexicans and Mexican Americans, since many unemployed Anglos did not differentiate between the two. Statements such as

Massey's reveal the complexity of the struggle for identity construction and American citizenship status for both peoples.

The complexity of this struggle for identity is even more convoluted when one considers that ethnicity is not so easily defined. Massey gives a very clear-cut definition of who a Chicano is, but the definition varies widely depending on the source. This point can be supported by Gutiérrez with his detailed account of how Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Anglos relate to one another. In *Walls and Mirrors*, for instance, he discusses the Chicano Movement and describes the emergence of the Chicano as an evolution. Chicano identity, primarily began with young Mexican Americans, namely high school and college students in the late 1960s and 1970s. By the middle of the 1970s these particular Mexican Americans "began to reassess the significance of the ethnic heritage for their own sense of identity" (180). Subsequently, as the 70s came to a close, they began to view immigration with a new attitude and actively supported "the civil and human rights of Mexican immigrants" (181).

The new Mexican American attitude towards immigration did not begin with the Chicano, though. It was motivated by certain anti-immigrant legislation in the 50s when new federal immigration and naturalization laws were passed. Because these new immigration laws did not only affect Mexican immigrants but Mexican Americans as well, Mexican Americans began to understand the true source of their "depressed position" (Gutiérrez 153). It was not the immigrant after all but "the persistence of discriminatory policies and practices that allowed the exploitation of Mexican Americans and other ethnic minorities in American society to continue" (153). Laws such as the Internal Security Act of 1950 and the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, coupled with

Operation Wetback in 1954, all helped Mexican Americans realize “how closely their own civil liberties were tied to the legal and political status of Mexican immigrants” (153).

In response, associations, such as LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, and the National Agricultural Workers’ Union (NAWU), somewhat reversed their stance on immigration, even though they at one time had no regrets if immigrants suffered at the hands of U.S. immigration law. For instance, though they continued to support some aspects of negative immigration policies, LULAC, began to soften its position regarding Mexican immigrants. Gutiérrez mentions a particular article in the *LULAC News*, May 1954, where “the author ... expressed concern over the treatment of Mexican aliens, pointing out that most returned to Mexico ‘broken men, with strength spent and exhausted by the senseless struggles of a life revolving around slavish, ill-paid labor and the degradation of jail and prison cells’” (164). In addition, the article expresses admiration for the bravery and courage of Mexican immigrants as they traveled a difficult road in order to provide for their family. To confirm LULAC’s change in position, in 1954, the league’s national president, Albert Armendáriz, argued that “assimilation at the expense of tradition and culture was unacceptable” (165). Finally, immigration, at least for the time being, was not a divisive factor but rather a unifying one.

Regarding culture and tradition, the new positions taken by LULAC and other similar organizations were related to that which became part of the ideology of Chicanos. Within this particular ideology, self-identification as a Mexican was of the greatest importance. Ernesto Galarza, associated with NAWU, felt that the source of conflict between Mexicans and Mexican Americans was not immigration but the “confusion in

cultural and political identities that mass immigration had created in the Southwest's ethnic Mexican population" (Gutiérrez 167). The changes in ideology of well-established Mexican American organizations as well as the rise of new political organizations, like the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations in Texas, that proudly asserted their ethnic backgrounds, made way for great progress, as symbolized by the Chicano Movement in the 1960s.

Some Mexican Americans began to speak out about their civil rights and civil liberties through a series of social protests beginning in the 1960s that together came to be known as the Chicano Movement. The activists of this movement addressed several issues, such as the civil liberties and human rights of both Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, including the issue of ethnic solidarity and education, as they related to their inferiority and the racial discrimination and segregation within the public school system. To achieve their civil liberties, Chicanos soon followed "established strategies within the American electoral system" (Gutiérrez 180). And even though they emphasized ethnic political mobilization, education, naturalization, citizenship, and the abolition of the Bracero Program, all were integrally part of their political cause. Activists wanted to empower Mexicans and Mexican Americans so they could better manipulate the political system in their favor. Working within the framework of the electoral system enabled them to expand their vote and eliminate exploitative programs like the Bracero program.

As a unified people, Mexicans and Mexican Americans opposed the Bracero Program and in 1964 succeeded in having the federal government terminate it. Due to their progress, immigration became a non-issue in national politics, at least for a while.

Because immigration was no longer a threat to either Mexicans or Mexican Americans, the population of persons with Spanish-surnames continued to grow and grow together with a similar purpose. Gutiérrez points out that the demographics of both Mexicans and Mexican Americans since the 1960s exerted a “powerful influence on both ethnic politics and attitudes about immigration and ethnic identity among Mexican Americans during this volatile period of American history” (183). This is reflected through the positive effects of the Chicano movement, as no other series of political events brought such an ethnic awareness to Mexican Americans.

Chicanos became so engrossed with the roots of their Mexican ethnicity that they embraced the ancient lands of the Aztecs as their own. Aztlán was considered the homeland of the Mexica people, the same land Mexico lost to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. In 1848, shortly after the Mexican American War, Mexican Americans did whatever they could to separate themselves from their indigenous roots, but a little over a hundred years later, many would look for a connection under a new identity as Chicanos. Some Chicano militants went as far as to consider themselves a race of their own, as can be seen in a declaration by the participants of the First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference: “‘Before the World, before all of North America, before all our bothers in the Bronze Continent, We are a Nation, We are a Union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán. Por La Raza todo, Fuera de la raza nada’ (For the Chicano people everything; for [non-Chicanos] nothing)” (Gutiérrez 185). If Chicanos can be considered a separate people, this declaration places them as superior in the racial order. This idea of Aztlán rejects any connection with Anglo American culture and society, but what does it do to the culture and society of both Mexicans and Mexican Americans? Does it create a

new division where, at one time, the Chicano identity seemed to mend the divide between these two peoples? Outward declarations such as these and “The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán” were most likely symbols of rebellion, but within them was great power. So powerful were these words and actions that even the Mexican Americans that were steadfast in their ways worked within the framework of the movement because their interests were better served in that manner.

As history does tend to repeat itself, the immigration issue resurfaced and was exaggerated, once again, due to another slump in the U.S. economy. The combination of these two factors in the 1970s once again made immigration a divisive issue among Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos. But the unification that resulted from previous immigration policies and the Chicano movement caused immigration to be reassessed more differently than ever before in Mexican American history. Even though the focus of the Chicano movement was not immigration, it unintentionally became so, the actual focus was their ethnic identity and ethnic autonomy. An example of Chicano activism as it related to immigration was the formation of the group Center for Autonomous Social Action (CASA). Organized in 1968 by community activists, Bert Corona and Soledad “Chole” Alatorre, their mission was “to provide needed services to undocumented Mexican workers in the United States” (Gutiérrez 190). CASA was definitely a more radical group when compared to traditional Mexican American organizations like LULAC and the American GI Forum. In fact, they claimed that Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos were indistinguishable, as they all fell victim to exploitation in the United States. In addition, CASA was overt in its

accusation of this kind of exploitation when it stated that many in the U.S. used Mexican immigrants as their scapegoats for their social and economic problems.

When looking at the history of immigration as it relates to Mexico, one can see how obvious the scapegoat accusation is, but it is not something Mexican Americans of the time would readily admit. The reason for this is that until the 1950s, most Mexican Americans agreed with US immigration policies as they felt it protected their economic interests, and in doing so, they turned their backs on their Mexican brothers and sisters. A CASA member put it well when he stated ““The[se] workers never cause unemployment ... it’s the jobs that are disappearing to other countries and which are being eliminated due to corporate greed .... The aliens contribute much much more than they remove”” (Gutiérrez 190). CASA’s extreme positions were contagious, as can be seen when Chicano students as well as Mexican American academicians joined the cause by adopting a Marxist approach to further emphasize the exploitation of the working-class immigrant and Mexican Americans. Even LULAC, the American GI Forum, and other traditional Mexican American organizations agreed with the extreme positions of the Chicano activists and joined in the attempt to change immigration policy. The specific activity in question was the introduction of a bill by Assemblyman Dixon Arnett in 1970 and the centerpiece of U.S. Senator Rodino’s legislation which both penalized employers that hired non-resident workers. As one can see, CASA’s actions altered both the Chicano and Mexican American perspectives on immigration. CASA’s progress can be seen as one more step toward bridging the sometimes rancorous gap between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

It seems that since this divide was a key factor in the turbulent relationship that existed among these Mexican brethren, progress like this should have healed and rehabilitated the relationship. As has been witnessed in the past, not all Mexican Americans agreed with the radical direction Chicanos were taking with their movement of resistance. Still, during this time of progress, some Mexican Americans would come to believe that ““illegal aliens have no rights, and should be rounded up, and booted back across the border”” (Gutiérrez 195). While he was not this extreme, César Chávez, founder and figurehead of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), did not initially agree to the inclusion of Mexican immigrants in their fight for civil rights. In fact, in 1962, the UFW supported U.S. legislation when it addressed border control. Despite the fact that César Chávez was considered a national role model for Mexican Americans, due to his farmworkers movement, he was severely criticized when he and the UFW openly supported the Arnett and Rodino legislation. Consequently, he lost significant support from Chicano and Mexican American communities and was forced to refute his support of such legislation. According to Gutiérrez, he did so “[i]n a letter to the editor of the *San Francisco Examiner* dated November 22, 1974” (198). The UFW’s shift in position on immigration issues is a good example of the ever-changing stance on immigration by Mexican Americans. By 1975, most Chicanos and Mexican Americans realized ““that they would not be here if their fathers had not been illegal aliens”” (199).

Chicanos and Mexican Americans working together against discriminatory immigration legislation experienced one more upset when President Carter, a candidate they supported, gained office in 1976 and announced the administration’s reform package for immigration. Because the immigration package resembled those of the past forty

years, activists were sharply disappointed due to the lack of progress in immigration policy. A positive aspect that developed from this frustration is that Mexicans and Mexican Americans unified once again in opposition to this immigration legislation. LULAC acted in a more extreme fashion than ever before by stating that a lack of change in immigration policy would result in racism. The organization stated that Carter's proposal of a "national identification system, the reinstatement of some sort of limited foreign-worker program, and the imposition of employer sanctions ... would create 'a dual system of employment [in which] hiring will be based largely on a prospective employee's pigmentation and English speaking ability'" (201). Their concern was that employers would be so worried about potential penalties that their employment requirements would be based solely on skin color.

Even more dramatic than the uncharacteristic response from LULAC was the organization of the First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy in 1977 in San Antonio Texas. Its purpose was of course to oppose the new Presidential administration's stance on immigration. An issue of great concern in the past was also the conference's "Call for Action" (Gutiérrez 201). It was the issue of scapegoating that prompted the participants to action because they felt that the government's new stance on immigration would once again place the blame for a suffering economy on all people of Mexican descent. As Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Mexican immigrants once again unified for a cause, they demanded certain rights for immigrants and their families, such as the right to unionize, apply for unemployment compensation, and the education of their children (in the United States). The First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy was not only a

medium for political action but was also a symbol of unity for Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Mexican immigrants.

Historically, many Mexican Americans denied any connection with their Mexican cultural roots in order to ease their way into the European-based Anglo culture of the U.S. The desire for acceptance and the continual immigration policy issues that followed caused a great division among Mexican Americans and Mexicans. Once U.S. legislation on immigration began to threaten not only immigrants but also Mexican Americans, they began to desire regaining what many once denied themselves. Many Americans of Mexican descent began to embrace the culture of their ancestors and soon identified themselves as Chicanos. Realizing that immigration policy was just another tool the Anglos used to divide the people of Mexican descent, similar to their use of racial order many years before and still, Chicanos and Mexican Americans joined together to work against the prejudice and exploitation of their Mexican brothers and sisters. Working together, they were able to make many progressive changes socially, politically, and culturally.

Regretfully, a division still exists. Some Mexican Americans are still resistant to all that was brought about by the Chicano movement and remain highly influenced by the Anglo American perspective on assimilation. Where the fight for immigration reform was and still is a cause for unity, Mexican Americans and Chicanos greatly disagree about their seemingly mutually exclusive ethnic identity and ideology. This truth places Chicanos closer to their Mexican brothers and sisters, while more moderate Mexican Americans remain at a distance. In addition, Chicanos believe that the differences between Mexican Americans and Mexicans should disappear and that Mexican people

should be their equals. But many Mexican Americans do not feel that way. Because LULAC's views can be considered representative of the views of moderate Mexican Americans, a hard truth is revealed when one considers an opinion of a certain LULAC member, as stated in the late 1970s:

Mexico and its people know, and readily admit, that no one born in the United States is a Mexican, even if his [or her] parents were Mexican .... We have never been Mexicans nor Mexican Americans ... much less Chicano. Wake up, Spanish-Speaking Americans – claim your rightful heritage, your real nationality. Tell the world, with the rest of our fellow citizens – I Am An American – don't call me anything else!" (Gutiérrez 204)

Even though these are words from the past, statements such as these reveal the animosity between Mexican Americans and Mexicans, an animosity resembling what still exists among them today.

Through the study of modern and postmodern works by Mexican American and Mexican authors, readers can observe the struggles that exist between these cultures. Identity formation is at the center of this struggle, as revealed by this brief glimpse of Mexican American history. Hopefully, it will be clearer when this thesis discloses the current perspectives of the cultures in question. But how can students of such literature, who's claimed ethnic identity is different, identify with this struggle? When authors choose to write about controversial issues like those mentioned in this introduction, are they contributing to a solution, or do they further fuel this ongoing battle for a separate and/or common identity? As part of this thesis, I analyze the following literary works:

*Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings, ...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him, Bless Me, Ultima, Pilgrims in Aztlán, The Revolt of the Cockroach People, and The Crystal Frontier.* They have been studied and reflected upon in order to better see their historical significance as well as to show how they can be used as teaching tools. The goal is for students to gain a better understanding of ethnic identity construction and, through this journey of discovery, obtain a better understanding of themselves.

## II

### THE STANDPOINT OF A MEXICAN

Looking at the surface only, how does a Mexican currently living in the United States differ from a Mexican American? From my perspective, that of an Anglo, a Mexican must be born in Mexico and enter the United States as an immigrant with or without documentation. While living on the U.S. side of the border, Mexican Nationals may choose to become a resident or even a citizen of the United States, but they still at some level remain ethnically Mexican. Some scholars, like Pablo Vila the author of *Border Identifications*, allude to the fact that if a Mexican chooses to adopt the egalitarian ways of North Americans, he or she can become Mexican American, but I disagree. Whether or not Mexicans choose to maintain their ethnic cultural identity through tradition and language, they, in my opinion, remain Mexican. If one follows the scholarly claim that a Mexican can become Mexican American, who decides that identity? If it is the Mexican who decides, will society recognize him or her as such?

History tells us that many factors both socially and politically divide Mexicans and Mexican Americans. It is known that immigration is a source of political tension, but what is the source of this social tension? Many ties bind these two identities, but these same ties can also morph into divisive factors. Culture is such a factor, and as a result, it serves as a source of social friction. Mexicans and Mexican Americans share a similar heritage and culture; therefore, they have ties to similar traditions, religion, and language. The difference in cultural beliefs arises in practice, as some follow with their Mexican

beliefs in a customary fashion, while others practice their beliefs differently, and some choose not to practice them at all. Consequently, it is not the similarities in Mexican culture but the manner in which they are practiced, or not, that socially divides Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Racial order is another divisive factor, but it works socially and politically; in fact, it oftentimes decides social and political privilege. These factors, as they relate to the past, are explored in the introduction, but what is the Mexican perspective on these issues?

Pablo Vila, in his work *Border Identifications*, points out that cultural divisions are not limited to the relations between Mexicans and Mexican Americans but exist between Mexicans as well. Vila centers his work on the impact of geography, how people relate to one another, depending on where they are from. Accordingly, a person's perspective on culture, as it relates to language and tradition and their views regarding the factors that contribute to a social hierarchy, such as gender, religion, and class, is decided by geographical location on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. As stated by numerous Mexican interviewees during Vila's ethnographic study, the bottom rung of the Mexican social ladder exists in the central and southern regions of Mexico, specifically the rural areas, with the higher rungs existing on the U.S. side of the border. Keep in mind that the majority of the interviewees are originally from Juarez; therefore, their opinion is extremely one-sided.

Juarenses and Fronterizos (Mexicans residing in the northern border regions of Mexico) find Mexicans who are more traditional and culturally conservative to be from the southern and central regions and more socially backwards. They draw their conclusions on the manner in which they practice Catholicism, function domestically, and

maintain their livelihood. Juarez and other northern border towns are obviously more influenced by the United States than those communities of the southern and central states of Mexico. Because of this geographical location and the social hierarchy in Juarez, Juarenses think of themselves as more civilized, “a special kind of Mexican – more modern, liberal, and hardworking” (Vila 36). On the other hand, central and southern Mexicans find Juarenses less Mexican as they closely relate the traditional practices of Catholicism and cultural rituals to “Mexicanness.” Ironically, the Juarenses apply this same ideological belief when assessing the “Mexicanness” of Mexican Americans, who, like Juarenses, are discerned as less Mexican than Mexicans from southern and central Mexico.

According to Vila’s study, “being more Catholic is equated with being more Mexican” (31). Even though many Mexicans practice Catholicism, the severity of the manner in which they practice differs greatly and changes depending on the region in which it is practiced. To further explain the practice of Catholicism, we must take a second look at the claimed ancestry of the differing regions of Mexico. As mentioned in the introduction, many Mexicans residing in the northern regions of Mexico during the annexation of over half of Mexico’s territory in 1848 claimed Spanish ancestry rather than a Mexican indigenous one. Because of this claim one can assume that the northern Mexicans’ religious practices contain fewer rituals. Rituals are associated with the indigenous roots of Mexico, and during the Spanish conquest, while the Spanish over centuries Christianized the indigenous people, indigenous religious rituals were fused with Catholicism, so as a result, a very unique way of Catholic practice was created, mainly in the southern and central regions of Mexico. Traditional Catholicism in Mexico

can be identified by the public displays of shrines dedicated to the *Virgen de Guadalupe* as well as to certain patron saints. These shrines emphasize the importance of images, a characteristic of indigenous religious practices.

To further press this point about the differences among Mexicans' religious beliefs, one should note that ritual practices such as the dances of the *matachines* are still included in Catholic religious celebrations. In interviewing Ascención Carrillo, a native of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, I learned that *Matachines* are dancers that originally danced to honor the Aztec's gods of nature but who now dance for the Catholic saints or the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. As already mentioned, traditional ritualistic customs such as these are connected with the rural areas of south and central



Fig. 2 Altar Honoring Virgen de Guadalupe

Mexico. Juarenses and Fronterizos may still honor the saints and the *Virgen*, but images of them are kept privately. Felipe, an interviewee in Vila's study, emphasizes this point when he states that in Juarez he has "seen some [alters]...but maybe in two or three houses only, but not as many as they have in the South ...[:] this is not a small, backward village!" (Vila 37). The aggressive nature of these words not only reveals the differences of religious practice, dependent on region, but also the desire to disassociate from a "backwards" tradition.

The critical manner Juarenses use to analyze Mexicans of the southern and central regions of Mexico is somewhat hypocritical, as they also criticize Mexican Americans for

not being Catholic enough. Where Catholicism is related to “Mexicanness,” Fronterizos are less Mexican than southern Mexicans, and Mexican Americans are even less Mexican than Fronterizos. The manner in which the dead are honored is a decisive point, according to Juarenses, regarding “Catholicness/Mexicanness” (Vila 39). Juarenses argue that Mexican Americans have been so influenced by the Puritan tendencies of North Americans that they have forgotten how to care for their dead: “[in the United States] they don’t do anything to remember their dead. A special day to celebrate the dead doesn’t exist” (39). In Vila’s study the Mexican interviewees claim that honoring the dead is a Catholic tradition. This is confirmed by Protestants, both Mexican and Mexican American, when they admit that they left the tradition of the cult of the dead behind when they found Jesus Christ: “we do not practice [the cult of the dead] any longer, because we understand God’s Word now, and before we [visited cemeteries] because nobody had told us the truth” (65). But honoring the dead is more than just a Catholic tradition; it is also culturally indigenous to pre-Columbian Mexican natives and can easily be detached from Catholicism.

The Mexican perspective on death is connected with Aztec beliefs that preceded Catholicism. Where North Americans, including Mexican Americans, make futile attempts to escape death, Mexicans face it; they do not fear it. The Mexican’s ability to confront death, according to Octavio Paz in “The Labyrinth of Solitude”, stems from their understanding of Aztec beliefs:

The opposition between life and death was not so absolute to the ancient Mexicans as it is to us [Mexicans of today]. Life extended into death, and vice versa. Death was not the natural end of life but one phase of an

endless cycle. Life, death and resurrection were stages of a cosmic process which repeated itself continuously. Life had no higher function than to flow into death, its opposite and complement; and death, in turn, was not an end in itself: man fed the insatiable hunger of life with his death. Sacrifices had a double purpose: on the one hand man participated in the creative process, at the same time paying back to the gods the debt contracted by his also social life, which was nurtured by the former. (54-55)

If one considers this perspective, death is a celebration for Mexicans and can be seen as such in the ceremonial traditions of the wake and funeral. These traditions do vary by region, though.

Regarding the regions of central Mexico, my respondent Ascención conveys his experience regarding the cult of the dead. He states that following the death of a loved one, the deceased is bathed and dressed in something special to him or her, whether it be matrimonial attire or even

clothing similar to that of the *Virgen*. A room or outdoor tent is then designated for the body and is decorated in the colors of black and purple. Candles are brought by friends and



family to light the way of the deceased. Through the night friends and family gather to visit the deceased and share in traditional food and drink.

Fig. 3 Altar Honoring the Dead

Music is also part of this celebration, as musicians play various instruments and sing “Alabanzas” (songs to the dead). On the day of the burial, the body is carried to the cemetery by the people of the community, and a priest performs a Catholic ceremony. For nine days, a rosary is said, and the tradition of this rosary is carried on for nine years. Evidently, this ceremony is a fusion of religious and indigenous cultural traditions, but the ritual is that of ancient Mexicans. This celebration of death is continued in the care of the grave and on El día de los muertos. On this day, preparations are made in order to honor the dead, including the display of images of the deceased, candles to light their way, water for refreshment, and even favorite foods. Light and water are the most important components, and it is necessary for them to be maintained during the entire time of honor.

To further emphasize the Mexican perspective on death, I would like to look at the fictional work of Chicano author, Miguel Méndez, *Pilgrims in Aztlán*. In creating the Mexican character Rosario Cuamea, known also as Colonel Chayo, Méndez is able to communicate a Mexican perspective on death. Méndez’s method also stresses his identity as a Chicano because he reveals his desire to be connected with his ethnic roots. Even more so, Cuamea is described as an indigenous Yaqui, revealing Méndez’s recognition of the influence the indigenous have on the Mexican people, a fact Paz has also expressed. Méndez depicts Cuamea as fearless and even barbaric, the Mexican Revolution being his first contact with “Mexican” civilization. The fury ever present in his demeanor stems from the loss of his tribal land; in fact, “[h]e fought with the rancor and rage of his tribe, which was painfully dispossessed of its territory, ripped like flesh from the body” (Méndez 156). An experience like that of Cuamea can leave a man cold, but it is evident

in his anger that he is still greatly affected by the loss of those he cares for as well as by the loss of his tribal territory.

Following a battle or rather a massacre, he found his good friend Elpidio taking his last breath, but that is not all he found, as he also found death: “He saw the Skinny Lady over to one side, and he shouted at her enraged: you carried off my buddy, daughter of a whore! He would then see her everywhere, multiplied, as though each dying man were a pool of blood representing her” (156). But he was not afraid of her, as a Mexican is not afraid of death; rather, he wanted to embrace her, as he had fallen in love with death. He was so overwhelmed with his desire for her that “[s]uch an absurd, outrageous, incredible passion devoured him that he swore to make her his lover” (157). Not only is this idea unfathomable to the majority of people but also to death itself, as she then fears Cuamea. Regardless of her many attempts to avoid him, in the end, she went to him, and at that moment he followed through with his promise, as he made love to death, “Colonel Cuamea gave a terrible death rattle, stretched his body gasping, and felt an intense, very intense orgasm...” (169). This portrayal of a man’s relation to death is unique to many Mexicans.

Quite different from the close relationship to death often conveyed in Mexican culture, some Mexican Americans do not even honor the dead. Mexican Americans who practice Protestantism or who are simply non-practicing Catholics turn their backs on death, thus losing part of their Mexican identity. In Paz’s view, death is an important component of a Mexican’s cultural identity construction because death is a kind of freedom for the Mexican, where life has been so treacherous that it “‘has cured us of [our] fear’” of death (58). Taking Paz’s perspective as that of a prototypical Mexican, one

can see the close relation between Catholicism to “Mexicanness.” It is necessary to look at the pecking order that accompanies this relation, with southern Mexicans practicing a more traditional kind of Catholicism, Fronterizos a more modern form, and some Mexican Americans practicing a different religion all together. This order reveals how Mexican people of different regions relate to one another. With region being such an influential factor in constructing the identity of Mexicans, could one say that there is a greater uneasiness between southern Mexicans and Mexican Americans as they represent the different extremes of a cultural continuum? And if so, can this idea be applied to divisive factors other than religion?

Vila’s work makes an excellent point regarding the effects of geography. As it was with Mexican Catholicism and ritual religious traditions, so it is with language, which changes with geography. Through observation, I have found that the Spanish spoken in the interior of Mexico differs greatly from what is spoken in the northern border regions and even more so on the U.S. side, where it is less formal. I believe that in some cases, this enigma of language differences among people of Mexican descent is caused by a lack of education, but primarily, is due to the influence of the United States. The U.S. influence is apparent, as the words particular to this strange language seem to be a fusion of Spanish and English. Various scholars mention this. Gutiérrez, in *Walls and Mirrors*, points out that with the rise of pachuco gangs also came a unique form of speech. Gutiérrez furthers his claim by pointing out the fact that these second generation youths were exposed to both the culture of their parents as well as to that of the United States, thereby emphasizing the impact of the American mainstream on the Spanish language. Paz confirms this when he discusses the pachuco in “The Labyrinth of Solitude”, where

he credits him with a certain language. He goes on to say that the word pachuco is “of uncertain derivation, saying nothing and saying everything. It is a strange word with no definite meaning; or, to be more exact, it is charged like all popular creations with a diversity of meaning” (14).

In his study of the last three decades of U.S. socioeconomic realities, *Categorically Unequal*, Massey also discusses language and contributes a certain prejudice to what he calls Chicano English. According to a 2000 Housing Discrimination Study, related to the San Francisco Bay area, “documented...linguistic profiling excluded speakers of Chicano English” (Massey 154). Massey clearly points to a form of speech that is neither Spanish nor English but a fusion of both. Méndez also places importance on language when the narrator of *Pilgrims in Aztlán*, describes a Chicano, Frankie Pérez, and recalls his forced assimilation into U.S. culture:

Although he was just beginning to live, his conscience already was demanding an accounting from him, a justification for the absurd drama that destiny had set for him. He, his family, the war, prejudice, slavery, school. Spanish is not spoken! Hunger. Spanish, no! The grapes the cantaloupes, cucumbers, cotton. Without medications! I told you. Don't speak Spanish. Dark people are worthless. Get to working hard, hard, hard. Listen. Speak English. The war, the war, ah, ah, the wa .... (140)

Analyzing the way Méndez emphasizes forced assimilation through language, one can see that it makes sense that a combination of Spanish and English could develop due to Spanish influences in the home and English ones at school.

Méndez's point is similar to that of Gutiérrez's where he discusses pachucos being caught between two cultures, with language a popular topic of identity construction since it is both definitive and divisive, definitive in that it identifies an individual's place of origin. As mentioned before, language is affected by geographic location. In Vila's *Border Identifications*, he mentions the maquiladoras in Juárez. Considering that most of these assembly plants are owned by U.S. companies, it is very likely that Spanish and English are spoken in these facilities. The fact that these plants exist so close to the border just magnifies the influence that English has on spoken Spanish. Some words that I have heard spoken in predominantly Spanish-speaking work places, like restaurant kitchens, include *leakear*, *lockear*, *chattear*, *dumpear*, *clockear*, *textear*, *weldear*, and, *soldear*. It is evident that these are English verbs that are being treated as Spanish verb forms. When used, these verbs are conjugated accordingly in Spanish. The use of this fused language identifies people as Fronterizos, Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans, or Chicanos. It is not likely that words such as these would be used in the southern or central areas of Mexico, unless of course if it is brought back by an immigrant worker of that region or if the region includes indigenous people who fuse their native tongue with Spanish.

For some Mexicans, this language creation, in the U.S., is offensive and divisive. When questioning Ascención about this subject, he answered by sharing his experiences of his first months in the United States. He recalls the confusion that came with listening to the conversations of his fellow workers as they used words like *roofear* and *weldear* to describe the different responsibilities of the job. Granted, he was actively learning English at the time; however, this fusion was not only nonsense to him but also offensive,

as he found it disrespectful to both languages. In “The Labyrinth of Solitude” Paz’s reaction to the language of pachucos is similar, as he also alludes to its nonsensical quality. He parallels the pachuco’s ambiguous purpose with the ambiguity of his language:

Their attitude reveals an obstinate, almost fanatical will-to-be, but this will affirms nothing specific except their determination—it is an ambiguous one, as we will see - not to be like those around them. The *pachuco* does not want to become Mexican again; at the same time he does not want to blend into the life of North America. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma. Even his very name is enigmatic: *pachuco*. (14)

The pachuco’s language reveals the defining and divisive quality of language, since it defines his rebellious character and emphasizes his desire to disassociate from the culture of his elders as well as that of the United States.

Racial order is also divisive of relations between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Gutiérrez states that both groups consider themselves “La Raza” as they “are both called Mexicans by white Americans; they live together in the same districts; they belong to the same social stratum; they talk the same language; they wear the same clothes and possess the same needs and ideals; and most significant of all, they frequently intermarry” (61). But they still have their differences. These contradictory facts make the uneasiness among them very complicated. History can be considered as a contributing factor to racial stratification since it reveals that many of the original Mexican Americans of 1848 (many of them previously the Mexican elite) did not consider themselves

Mexican at all. They claimed Spanish blood and denied any indigenous ancestry. If one looks even further into history, a caste system based on race was evident in colonial Mexico. In “The Labyrinth of Solitude”, Paz mentions the social structure of New Spain where “[t]here were classes, castes, and slaves” (103). Evidently, for a people who claimed Spanish descent, racial order was not a new concept for them; in fact, one could say it came naturally. But according to Gómez, this was a “tactic that evolved from the intense anti-Mexican racism of the 1880’s” (9).

It is strange to consider the ideology of white supremacy when discussing the racial order of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as they relate to one another, but in the Mexican Americans’ claim to Spanish blood, it is evident that many considered their European ancestry superior to that of the indigenous of Mexico. In honoring only their Spanish heritage, many Mexican Americans fell under what Gómez terms the “one drop” rule and maintained their political rights, even though they were still considered racially inferior to Anglo Americans. Because they remained in the political arena, they assured themselves an acceptable position in the social hierarchy by favoring a Spanish ancestry rather than an indigenous Mexican one. Claims such as these created a more comfortable, yet temporary, position in Anglo American society for many of these Mexican Americans, but at the same time, it created animosity between themselves and their Mexican brethren.

In response, Mexicans have often felt that Mexican Americans have pushed them down to the dregs of society while claiming and maintaining an undeserved superior position on the social scale. Gutiérrez mentions a particular Mexican American subject in Mexican sociologist Manuel Gamio’s studies, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*

(1930) and *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story* (1931). This subject, Luis Albornoz, felt this sense of superiority. He had lived his entire life in Tito, New Mexico, and “Gamio noticed ‘a certain tendency of Sr. Albornoz to look down on the humble Mexican workers; he believes that their faults cannot be corrected. When he deals with them he does so with a certain air of superiority...’” (63).

Attitudes from the 1930s such as these facilitated a response from Mexican immigrants who maintained their ethnic identity as *mexicanos de afuera*. They chastised Mexican Americans for being a people without country or a culture. Even though they themselves lived in the U.S., some of them for many years felt they were in the position to judge Mexican Americans because they maintained their Mexican nationality and were extremely proud of their country. Returning to Gamio’s study, Gutiérrez focuses on a certain respondent’s comment that emphasizes Mexican pride: “‘I would rather cut my throat,’ he said, ‘before changing my Mexican nationality’” (63). There is an implication here in this statement that Mexicans Americans are sell-outs and that they have become something they are not in order to better assimilate. The feelings of resentment regarding racial order are continuous, as the very sentiments expressed in this 1930s study are also reflected in Miguel Méndez’s literary work, *Pilgrims in Aztlán*, originally written in Spanish in 1968. He conveys a similar message during a conversation between immigrant farm workers depicted in his novel:

“He doesn’t give you a break. How come Chicanos who work as foremen are worse than the bosses themselves?”

“Because the bastards’re sellouts. It’s worse in construction, pal.

They try to do you in in just one day. These guys are real nuts and before you know it, they're talking to you in English.” (38)

Evidently, Mexican Americans felt and still see that a racial order regarding themselves and Mexican immigrants is necessary. On the one hand, it establishes, for them, acceptable positions on the social scale. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants find these attempts offensive because it is not necessary to establish a system similar to the caste system created during the Spanish colonial period, a cast system that simply does not apply to life in the United States. Mexico and the United States historically are very different. Paz explains it well, in “The Labyrinth of Solitude” when he writes about the different manners in which the Spanish colonies and those of the English were colonized. He states that even though some of the actions of the Spanish were horrific, they did not deny a single person a position on the social scale as the English did, as “[t]here were classes, castes, and slaves, but there were no pariahs, no persons lacking a fixed social condition, and a legal, moral and religious status” (103). The caste system that followed a specific order, *criollos*, *mestizos*, *mulattos*, and *indios*, was a very different system of inequality than that of the English colonies, a system that initially was based on class as it related to wealth.

The application of a caste system became inappropriate when the original Mexican Americans attempted to maintain their *criollo* status, by claiming Spanish ancestry, to insure their social position over the *indios*, an identity term that to this day is still associated with Mexican immigrants. Mexicans hold and have long held a great resentment towards Mexican Americans who still attempt to apply such social positions because, after all, Mexicans and Mexican Americans are both subjected to discrimination

in the Anglo American society of the United States. In addition, Mexican Americans who claim a certain degree of whiteness and attempt to disassociate from the indigenous people of Mexico carry themselves even further from their indigenous ethnic identity as a Mexican because Mexico's history is rooted in the indigenous: "the Mexican's entire life is steeped in Indian culture....Mexico is the most Spanish country in Latin America; at the same time it is the most Indian" (Paz 362).

Positions in the historical racial order of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. can be taken a step further if one looks jointly at Vila's geographically-based ethnographic study, *Border Identifications* and "The Other Mexico," an additional writing by Paz included in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*. As Vila claims, the perspectives of Mexicans change, depending on the regions from which they originate, as southern Mexicans are characterized as more traditional, and Fronterizos are depicted as more modern, and Paz decades before claims a similar trend. A brief recollection reveals that the original Mexican Americans who were once northern Mexicans lived in a region positioned in proximity to the northern borders, similar to that of the present-day border cities, like Tijuana and Juarez. Similarly, these Mexican Americans, northern Mexicans, thought of themselves as superior to those in the south, like those presently living along the border regions today.

Paz speaks of a similar geographical phenomenon when he discusses the *other* Mexico. He claims that two Mexicos exist, one modern and the other underdeveloped, and that this split is due to the fact that "[s]ome regions have been favored with the government's solicitude and credits, while others have been almost completely neglected" (259), depending on their industrial capabilities. Vila decades later alludes to

this same situation when he discusses the poverty within Mexico, with the south being associated with poverty and the border regions depicted as more prosperous. In fact, the Juarenses insinuate that the poverty in Juarez is due to the southern Mexicans that travel north to work in the city's maquiladoras, and even the factory managers believe "all of them [workers] come from the despised south" (Vila 174).

In Paz's work, poverty is associated with underdevelopment, and he utilizes interesting symbols to represent underdeveloped Mexico and a more modern developed Mexico. Ironically, these symbols can also be associated with a racial order. Corn and rice are associated with the underdeveloped and flour with the developed. This use of food symbols implies, according to Paz, that "Western civilization is superior to the others and that, within it, the North American version is the most nearly perfect" (285). He goes on and utilizes huaraches to further his point that "huaraches, in our climate, are superior to shoes; but the fact is that, in the context of our society, corn and sandals are characteristic of the other Mexico" (286), the indigenous Mexico. The developed Mexico models itself after the United States and turns its back on the "true historical, psychic, and cultural reality" of Mexico (286). Consequently, underdeveloped regions of Mexico become the "other," and as indios were othered by the criollos, the Mexicans of Paz's day were othered by Mexican Americans. Otherness in this sense alludes to "the [binary] notions of poverty and wealth, development or backwardness" (287), a binary subject explored equally as well when Vila discusses the stereotype that "all poverty is Mexican" (171).

As Mexican immigrants attempt to establish themselves in the United States, they fall victim to the stereotype that "all poverty is Mexican" (171). Vila in *Border*

*Identifications* establishes that this stereotype is initially applied to those from southern Mexico. But this stereotype does not remain within the borders of Mexico, as it continues across the border where the Mexican immigrant takes on the role of the southern Mexican and where many Mexican Americans take on that of Fronterizos. Part of Vila's study is based on interviewees' responses to particular photographs, as was the case when poverty was the focus. When interviewees incorrectly identified an impoverished El Paso community as a colonia, a community without utilities, on the outskirts of Juarez, they were shocked when the truth was revealed because they associated all poverty with Mexico, especially for Mexicans from the southern and interior regions. In response, Vila states that "they [tried] to make sense of a very unexpected situation, stressing that most probably the inhabitants of those poor colonias in El Paso [were] recent Mexican ... immigrants" (180).

Laziness is another negative personal trait Juarenses gift to southern Mexicans; in fact, they associate this stereotypical laziness with the impoverished conditions and people of the south. One Juarenses stated in disgust that "these are people [southern Mexicans] ... who don't really want to get on with life!" (174), associating their "lazy" work ethic with their poverty, as "[p]overty is one thing, laziness is another ..." (174). Stereotypes such as these are what Mexican Americans desperately want to avoid; as a result, they disassociate themselves from Mexican immigrants by raising themselves above them. Their desire to avoid discrimination, as it relates to these stereotypes, is a driving factor for their anti-immigration stance.

If Mexican immigrants are viewed as a threat by Mexican Americans, how is the volatile issue of immigration viewed by the Mexican? Most Mexican immigrants enter

the United States out of necessity, to better their economic situation. Others are lured by the utopian idea that everything is better on the other side and as a result are easily influenced by the “American” way of life, with some entirely turning their backs on their own culture. But the majority of Mexican immigrants are not this way and instead choose to maintain strong ties to their culture. By doing so, they keep their true identity, an identity difficult for Anglos and Mexican Americans to understand because the United States and Mexico are very different countries, both historically and currently. As a result, many Anglos are simply unable to understand something they cannot relate to, and most Mexican Americans, with some exceptions, are no longer close enough to theirs.

The creation of the “Mexican” stereotype is a compensatory tool that both Anglos and Mexican Americans use, due to their misunderstanding of each other. Massey explains this human behavior well when he states that it is natural for the human psyche to categorize and that stereotyping is part of this categorization. The “fundamental attribution error” explains this type of human behavior as a “general tendency to overestimate the importance of personal or dispositional factors relative to environmental influences in accounting for behavior” (Massey 14). In this instance, Mexicans are victims of such behavior and are considered “poor because they are lazy, lack work ethic, have no sense of moral responsibility, are careless in their choices, or are just plain immoral, not because they lost their jobs or were born into a social position that did not give them resources they needed to develop” (14). It is therefore necessary to include the variation of culture as a factor in contributing to divisions among Mexicans and Mexican Americans because contrasting cultures approach and handle situations differently and have different ideas of success.

As I have previously mentioned, there are many cultural differences among Mexicans and North Americans, including Mexican Americans. But one of the most influential factors, according to Paz, is the solitude of the Mexican. He states that the Mexican, regardless of gender or age, “seems...to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself [or herself]” (29). Regardless of how Mexicans appear, Paz believes they always wear a mask in order to remain remote from the rest of the world. Stepping away from this solitude is considered a sign of weakness; Mexicans therefore do not open up and share their lives with others. I agree with Paz’s claim, as I am intimate with the Mexican world, as my husband is Mexican.

For me, Paz’s words were a revelation because they explained the great contrast between the varied cultures of Mexico and the United States. As Paz states,

North Americans are credulous and we [Mexicans] are believers, they love fairy tales and detective stories and we love myths and legends. The Mexican tells lies because he delights in fantasy ...[:] the North American does not tell lies, but he substitutes social truth for the real truth, which is always disagreeable. We get drunk in order to confess; they get drunk in order to forget. They are optimists we are nihilists .... We are suspicious they are trusting. We are sorrowful and sarcastic they are happy and full of jokes. North Americans want to understand and we want to contemplate. They are activists and we are quietists .... They believe in hygiene, health, work and contentment, but perhaps they have never experienced true joy, which is an intoxication, a whirlwind. In the hubbub of a fiesta night our voices explode into brilliant lights, and life and death mingle together,

while their vitality becomes a fixed smile that denies old age and death but that changes life to motionless stone. (23-24)

Given Paz's explanation, it is no mystery why there is such a lack of understanding, a misunderstanding reflected in the continual conflicts caused by immigration.

It seems that problems regarding these cultural differences, as outlined above by Paz, were not foreseen when immigrants were invited for exploitative purposes. Gutiérrez states that through the institutionalization of many federal programs, like the Bracero Program, the federal government allowed the temporary employment of hundreds of thousands of Mexican laborers in North American agriculture. Pre-existent cultural differences coupled with controversial programs such as these provided Mexican Americans many excuses not to embrace their immigrating Mexican brethren. Some Mexican American activists like César Chávez criticized illegal immigration solely based on the fact that "the presence of a large pool of politically powerless noncitizen workers severely hampered efforts to unionize American citizen workers" (Gutiérrez 197). Others could not stand their presence simply because they were Mexicans, and their views speak for themselves: "illegal aliens have no rights, and should be rounded up, and booted back across the border" (195). Because the Bracero Program invited Mexican immigrants to the United States and their welcome was resisted by many of their Mexican American brethren, they could not help but be, to say the least, victims of mixed signals. It was only those individuals who later identified themselves as Chicanos who would empathize with the Mexicans' predicament because they valued their cultural roots and embraced their ethnic identity as Mexican.

While programs such as the Bracero Program may be things of the past, immigration is still a very real issue for both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The Chicano movement is still active today, as is evident not only in politics but also in the arts, including literature, a topic I will discuss in detail in this thesis. The movement continues just as the conflict does. I continually hear Mexican Americans deny their identity as Mexicans and at the next moment embrace it, depending on how their Mexican identity serves them, either as a help or a hindrance. Inconsistency such as this accentuates their struggle with identity. Who are they? Who do they want to be? By the same token it is evident to me that Mexicans are annoyed by their Mexican American brothers' lack of culture, even in the simplest things like child-rearing and cooking. In my opinion, because the Mexican immigrant situation, regarding Mexicans, is unique, due to the close proximity of the United States to Mexico, the conflict will likely never rest. Mexican Americans and Mexicans will continue to be lumped under the same negative stereotypes, and Mexican Americans will probably never be able to become their own unique culture.

### III

#### A MEXICAN AMERICAN'S VIEW

Mexican Americans are caught between cultures, subjected to the racial prejudice of Anglo Americans and criticized by Mexicans for abandoning their roots. As a result, many are unable to identify completely with either side and have developed an identity of their own, with some identifying themselves as Mexican American, others as Chicano. Mexican Americans are North Americans with a Mexican heritage who have often chosen to assimilate into the American mainstream. Chicanos are also U.S. born and possess a Mexican heritage, but they refuse to be identified as just Mexican Americans. Because of racism, they are resistant to North American culture and instead embrace their indigenous roots. The identity, Chicano, was created in the 1960's during the Chicano movement era in an effort for Chicanos to distinguish themselves from other Mexican Americans. Chicanos considered Mexican Americans sell-outs who have traded their indigenous culture for the Anglo American mainstream, evident in their "American" identity. Because of Chicanos' close ties with their indigenous ancestry; it seems that there may exist a better relationship between them and their Mexican brothers and sisters, when compared to that of Mexican Americans.

Given that Mexican Americans and Chicanos represent contrasting ethnic identities, those who bear these two separate yet overlapping identities have varying relationships with Mexicans. The central factors affecting these relations are cultural traditions, social and political privileges, a racial order, and immigration. On some issues,

the views of Mexican Americans and Chicanos are similar, but as their identities differ, so do their perspectives. In addition, the manner in which these identities have developed must also be considered because originally all U.S. born Mexicans were considered, by North American society, as Mexican, and it wasn't until much later that the unique identity of the Chicano was born.

The 1848 Mexican cession to the U.S. of what is now known as Texas, California, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico motivated the newly formed Mexican Americans to make many decisions about their citizenship that affected them socially and politically. Laura Gómez, author of *Manifest Destinies*, expresses that the Anglos or Euro-Americans that colonized these areas made it possible for Mexican Americans who possessed even “one drop” of Spanish blood to “designate themselves as legally white” (7), while those that were purely indigenous apparently could not. This allowance, by Anglo American law, caused a division among indigenous Mexicans and those who identified themselves as *Españoles*, a term Gutiérrez uses to convey the terminology elite mestizo families used to “distance themselves from what they defined as the *gente corriente*” (33), referring to the *indios*. By creating this division, many “elite” Mexican Americans in New Mexico were able to escape the prejudice associated with being Mexican. However, Mexican Americans' attempts to disassociate themselves from their indigenous roots later on caused them to be viewed as sell-outs by both Mexicans and Chicanos.

Chicanos on the other hand have held a different position in society than their forebears. Even though they were and still are subjected to great racialized prejudice by Anglo Americans, they were U.S. born citizens without the necessity of having to prove their degree of whiteness. The desperate effort to assimilate to Anglo American ways

made by the ancestors of Chicanos, however, was for naught. Gutiérrez further explains the Mexican Americans' pointless effort to distinguish themselves from other Mexicans:

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. (33)

Despite the efforts of many Mexican Americans, Anglos made no distinctions between Mexican Americans and Mexicans.

Political activism geared towards obtaining equality rather than the great desire to assimilate into North American mainstream society is what contrasts the Chicano from the Mexican American. Both Mexican Americans and Chicanos worked and still do work in an effort to change their social and political standing. The difference is that Mexican Americans continually attempt to better their positions by further assimilating into U.S. culture, while Chicanos continually challenge their lower social status. Martha Menchaca, in *Recovering History Constructing Race: The Indians, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans*, provides a good example of such activism when discussing the work of poet Alberto Balazar Urista, better known as Alurista. His work, in this case the "Epic Poem of Aztlán," was not only an introduction to the "seminal outline of the Mexican Americans' indigenous foundations" (Menchaca 19), but it was also an "attempt to invert the stigma attached to being a Brown people living in the United States and [to] transform that racial heritage into a legacy of pride" (20). Alurista recited his poem at the 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado. Representative of

Chicanos as a whole, his actions reveal the Chicanos' desire to redirect the focus from assimilation to change, and an acceptance of their true identity was clearly a necessity for many.

While Mexican Americans and Chicanos struggle with their ethnic identity, what is their perspective on the cultural traditions of Mexico, and how do their perspectives affect their relationship with Mexicans? Because religion, customs, and language are central to Mexican culture, they must be considered independently. Once again, it is a matter of cultural practice, as I mention in the previous chapter.

In relation to Catholicism, neither the Mexican American nor the Chicano practices the religion as traditionally as the Mexican, but the reasons differ. Mexican Americans, if they choose to practice Catholicism at all, practice privately. Vila in *Border Identifications*, points to an explanation that addresses a "shame" hypothesis. He states that because Catholicism is synonymous with being Mexican, many choose to detach themselves from it in order to continue their disassociation from all that is Mexican. This detachment, revealed through the privatization of religious symbols, such as the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, "also means metaphorically reducing the importance of the saints in one's religious practices. This reduction ... means likening one's faith to the faith of the supposedly more modern Americanized 'other,' the Protestant who does not worship saints at all" (49).

Mexican American Protestants further aggravate the pre-existent rift between Mexicans and Mexican Americans through their criticism of the worship of saints associated with Mexican Catholicism. Because the faith of Protestant Evangelicals is based solely on their belief in Jesus Christ and the personal salvation that results in this

belief, they condemn the religious practices of the Catholic faith. In fact, Vila conveys that they claim Catholics worship the dead “rather than a living God. Catholicism [is] dismissed as a pre-Hispanic vestige dressed up in Roman error, which [is] as pagan as it [is] heretical” (60). The criticism of the indigenous influence within Mexican Catholicism is also a criticism of Mexican ancestry, an aspect of their identity that Mexican Americans intentionally deny themselves.

Since indigenous practices are so closely related to Mexican Catholicism, one could theorize that Chicanos are more likely to maintain their Catholic faith due to their desire to better identify with their indigenous roots. Their acceptance of the Aztlán Nation as their own is testimony to the fact that this indigenous connection is a significant part of the Chicano identity. Despite the fact that Aztlán is a part of Mexico’s national heritage and indigenous history, Chicanos continue the story by claiming that Huitzilopochtli destined the “descendants of the Chichimec to return to Aztlán and reclaim their homeland” (Menchaca 23). As Menchaca notes, Chicano scholars claim that Aztlán was located somewhere in the vicinity of Arizona, New Mexico, California, or Colorado, but the location is still uncertain and debatable.

Catholicism and ancient Mexican religious traditions are still intertwined. Paz reveals this fact in “The Labyrinth of Solitude,” where he presents several analogies that parallel Aztec and Catholic symbols. For instance, Huitzilopochtli, like Jesus Christ, “was conceived without carnal contact; the divine messenger was likewise a bird ... and finally the infant Huitzilopochtli also had to escape the persecution of a mythical Herod” (Paz 83). Paz again chooses a dominant figure when he discusses the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. He first reminds the reader that the Virgin is the focus of Mexican Catholicism. He then goes

on by pressing the point that she is an Indian Virgin that first appeared to “the Indian Juan Diego [on] a hill that formerly contained a sanctuary dedicated to Tonantzin, ‘Our Mother,’ the Aztec goddess of fertility” (84). His choice of symbols emphasizes the connection between the world of the Aztecs and Mexican Catholicism where Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mother are held at the center and the rest, even God the Father, are skirted.

The activism of young Chicano Catholics during the Chicano movement confirms that Chicanos invested in their Catholic beliefs. Rather than stepping away from a religion that at that time was not supportive of the movement’s efforts, they chose change. Their choice enabled them to maintain a connection to a belief system that was rooted in their Mexican ancestry. According to *A History of Mexican Americans in California: The Chicano Movement*, “the Chicano movement generated such organizations as *Catolicos por la Raza* (Catholics for the Chicano People), which challenged the Church for pouring its money into opulent structures while neglecting to invest in social services to improve conditions for the Chicano poor (Pitti, par. 8). Because many Chicano Catholics have chosen to maintain their Catholic faith, they are better able to identify with their Mexican brothers and sisters, sharing with them an important part of their ethnic identity and culture.

Many Mexican customs are intertwined with Catholicism, and as it is with the religion, many Mexican Americans may either practice them less traditionally or perhaps not at all. If they are not practiced at all or in a way that completely separates them from the Catholic church, the reasons tend to be similar. It is either because they are detaching themselves from all that is Mexican or practicing a different religion, like Protestant

denominations. In an effort to explain, I have chosen two traditions clearly identified as Mexican: *El Domingo de Pascua* (Easter Sunday) and *La Quinceañera*.

Easter of course is not solely a Mexican celebration, but the manner in which many Mexicans celebrate it is unique. This is where the differences appear because many Mexicans and Mexican Americans honor this holy day differently. Vila confirms this point during an interview with an individual from Juarez:

“here we have a custom that’s really an American custom; we call it El Día de la Coneja [The Day of the Bunny], Easter. The way it is celebrated here is very much in the American style, but down there, in Southern Mexico, I don’t think ... [they celebrate this custom; I believe] they set on fire a Judas and stuff, and here no, here it is completely different! Here we are used to ... Easter baskets ... candy and stuff .... Over there it is different; they are used to more food...a party!” (37)

Granted, this individual is from Juarez, but since the Fronterizo/southern Mexican relationship is synonymous to that of the Mexican American/Mexican relationship, it is applicable to the comment the interviewee made about there being no relation between his Easter celebration and that of the Catholic holy day, or holy week for that matter.

The traditional Mexican Catholic Easter is not limited to one day but is spread out over an entire week, *La Semana Santa* (The Holy Week). According to Carrillo, the three days that receive particular recognition are *Viernes Santo* (Holy Friday), *Sabado de Gloria* (Glorious Saturday), and *El Domingo de Pascua* (Easter Sunday). Each holy day is recognized differently, and the elaborateness of the celebration depends on the community. On Friday, the workday ends at noon, and in some communities there is a

reenactment of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. If the celebration is less elaborate, the local Catholic Church holds a mass in the evening, including *Via Crucis* (The Stations of the Cross), a depiction of Christ's final hours before his death. Saturday is a day of great celebration. It begins at church, as it is the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The day continues, depending on the community, with parades that very often end in the destruction of a figure that symbolizes Judas, the traitorous apostle. The 40-day fast also ends on this day with great feasting, including treats like *capirotada*, Mexican bread pudding, and shaved ice. In addition, this day is highly associated with water; therefore, some families will travel to rivers and waterfalls to symbolically wash away their sins. Sunday is of course the official day of Easter, but in contrast to how it is celebrated in the United States, there are no egg hunts or bunny rabbits; there is simply a mass in the local Catholic churches. It seems that if one considers the comment of Vila's interviewee, an intricate celebration such as this is not modern enough or American enough to continue among Mexicans in the border regions or with Mexican Americans in the United States. Perhaps it is too backwards, as that has been inferred by some regarding other Mexican traditions.

A celebration occurring when girls reach the age of fifteen and also a long-standing event from Mexican tradition, la Quinceañera has been altered by the Mexican American. According to Ladan Alomar, a writer for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*, the Mexican Quinceañera dates back to the Aztecs. It



Fig. 4 Traditional Quinceañera Dress

was, the same as today, considered a girl's passage into womanhood. This rite of passage, now fused with Christianity, begins with a *misa de acción de gracias*, a thanksgiving mass held in the Catholic church. The birthday girl is accompanied by her parents, godparents, maids of honor, and chamberlains. The celebration that follows is often very elaborate, where all decorative colors match the birthday girl's dress. Music, dancing, feasting, and, of course, gift giving are all included in this fancy party.

Since the *Quinceañera* is rooted in the indigenous past of the Aztecs and is now associated with the Catholic church, it is not surprising that some Mexican Americans have either moved past this tradition all together or changed it to fit the American mainstream. For example, on more than one occasion, my Mexican American friends refer to this party as a Sweet Sixteen rather than to its rightful name. By disregarding the proper name, they remove the connection to the indigenous history where a girl of fifteen, not sixteen, is honored. This reiterates the idea that Mexican Americans want to disassociate with all that is Mexican. In addition, the Sweet Sixteen is an Anglo tradition, which says a lot on its own. Another detour from tradition is the exclusion of the Catholic mass. Because it is a young woman's debut before the church and society, the tradition is incomplete without the mass. But as Catholicism is connected with "Mexicaness," it often is not included. In some cases, because of the connection made between the Catholic Church and the *Quinceañera*, Mexican American Protestants simply do not celebrate this tradition.

It is evident that I did not spend time discussing the Chicano perspective on Mexican customs. I infer that a close relation exists between Mexican Catholicism and

Mexican customs. As a result, it can be concluded that Chicanos who choose to embrace Catholicism will also often embrace customs associated with it.

Many Mexican Americans have changed or excluded the Spanish language, like with Mexican customs and Catholicism, from daily life. In the 1920s, when organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) established themselves with the intent to set Mexican Americans apart from Mexican immigrants and to better assimilate into U.S. culture, language was a central factor. In *Walls and Mirrors*, Gutiérrez communicates that in order to assimilate into the American mainstream; many Mexican Americans felt that they had to appear as upstanding American citizens. As a result,

Mexican American organizations carefully cultivated what they considered to be an appropriate American public image by conducting their proceedings in English, by prominently displaying the American flag in their ceremonies, stationery, and official iconography, by singing such songs as “America” at their gatherings, and by opening their meetings with a recitation of the “George Washington Prayer.” (Gutiérrez 76)

Organizations such as these were far different than what preceded them. According to Gutiérrez, in the 1920s, organizations were based on the cooperation between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. They consequently more closely maintained their ethnic and cultural heritage. The civil organizations that followed, like LULAC, The Order of the Sons of America, and The Order of the Knights of America, found it to be a hindrance to their goal, as they were attempting to be “participating members of American society” (76). Wedging themselves between their Mexican culture and the

culture of the Anglos later proved to be counterproductive, a fact realized during the rise of the Chicano movement.

By the late 1950s, some Mexican Americans changed their tactics, and instead of denying their ethnic heritage, they organized behind it. Their effort evolved into an attempt to create equality for themselves as a Brown people rather than to assimilate into a white culture. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s followed this shift in tactics, where Chicano militants intentionally set themselves apart from Mexican Americans, and to this end, “the term Chicano was adopted by young Mexican Americans as an act of defiance and self-assertion and as an attempt to redefine themselves by criteria of their own choosing” (Gutiérrez 184). This criterion necessitated that they embrace their Mexican ethnicity, including the Spanish language, Mexican traditions and customs, as well as their indigenous ancestry. The latter were represented significantly

by the concept of Aztlán. The factor of time must be considered here.

Chicanos benefited from the efforts of Mexican Americans in the past. Because Mexican American activists previously laid down the groundwork, Chicanos had the freedom to



*Fig. 5 Map of Aztlán*

embrace their indigenous ancestry while at the same time fighting for their equal rights as a Bronze People. In the case of their Mexican American forerunners, they did not have this liberty; in fact, they felt that their survival within Anglo society was dependent on their claim to whiteness.

Racial order is another significant factor for understanding what Mexican Americans have continually placed great importance on – social and political privilege. Ever since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, attaining social and political privilege has been a challenge for Mexican Americans. Even today, social privilege poses its challenges and still, in most cases, the obstacle is racial discrimination. Early on, following the cession of more than half of Mexico, social and political privileges were based on a degree of whiteness, as previously mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. Accordingly, Mexican Americans who possessed even “one drop” of Spanish blood claimed to be white, thus raising their social standing above indigenous Mexicans by being allowed to maintain land and political rights.

Laura Gómez in *Manifest Destinies* states the obvious when she mentions that “racial differences are socially constructed” (3). The “off-white status” (3) of many if not most Mexican Americans was constructed by Anglos in the 1840s, even before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was finalized in 1848. Even though this status was motivated by the Anglos in order to divide the alliance between indigenous Mexicans and those of Spanish descent, it was maintained by Mexican Americans in their effort to continue claiming a degree of whiteness. Gómez provides an example of such an effort when she explains that Mexican American elites enslaved Pueblo Indians so they could “protect their ideological and material interests” (11). For the Mexican American elite, slaveholding was a status symbol, as “possession of Indian slaves marked them as both economically and racially privileged” (109).

The issue regarding Mexican Americans’ degree of whiteness has always been complicated. Whiteness decided citizenship when Mexico was ceded to the United States

in 1848. It was also an issue for naturalization into citizenship: “The only precedent setting legal case involving a Mexican seeking American naturalization is *In re Rodriguez*, decided by a federal judge in Texas in 1897. The essential logic of *Rodriguez* was that Mexicans were *white enough*, despite not being truly white” (Gómez 139). Even though Mexican Americans eventually were categorized as legally white, they have remained “socially non-white” (149). Gómez mentions that even when many other off-white groups, like Italians, Irish, and Jews, were established as white, Mexican Americans remained off-white, neither white or non-white. The United States Census Bureau has continued this kind of racial assessment, thus enabling us to see that race still decides social status.

Gómez states that in 1980 the Census Bureau, under the guidance of Mexican American committee members, decided that Americans with Mexican or Latin American origins would be designated Hispanic (150). According to Gómez, Hispanics are the largest growing ethno-racial group in the United States, with Mexican Americans making up 60 percent of that group. The way the Census Bureau designates race affects social order because over the last 160 years, it has continuously varied: “between 1850 and 1920, Mexican Americans ... were counted in the white category ... [and] in 1930 ... for the first and only time, ‘Mexican’ appeared as a separate racial category” (152). The 1930s categorization appeared during the Great Depression, and it was no coincidence. It was intended to help eliminate the economic competition, confirmed when 400,000 people, of Mexican origin, were loaded up and sent to Mexico, Mexican Americans included. Following this outrage, there were many attempts to find proper categorization labels. In 1980 the Census bureau finally decided to create two different questions, one

regarding ethnicity (Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino) and one regarding race (white, black, other). In 2000, “[n]inety-nine percent of those who identified themselves as Hispanic selected only one racial category, and the Census officially reports that ‘among Hispanics, 92 percent were white’” (153). This Census history once again confirms that the identity of Mexican Americans is highly complicated. It seems that, on the one hand, they do not want to deny their ethnicity, but on the other, they desire the social and political privilege that accompanies the racial designation of “white.” Such a widely held perspective reveals that the Mexican American perspective on racial order and social and political privilege has not largely changed since 1848. Many Mexican Americans are still concerned about being negatively associated with all that is stereotypically “Mexican,” whether it is in relation to a particular character trait or legal status.

Another factor impinging on the identity formation of Mexican Americans is immigration, and on the U.S.-Mexican border, it is probably ever more complicated and involved than ever before. Due to various circumstances including the most influential, The War on Terrorism that began in 2001, the United States has made its borders less permeable and the immigration process more stringent. But it is not the fear associated with such efforts as The War on Terrorism that concerns many Mexican Americans; instead, it is the Mexican immigrant. Mexican immigrants bring with them a stereotype that has long been assigned by Anglo Americans. In addition, they bring their desire to work, to better their economic situation, and are therefore a threat. They come, not as terrorists but as competitors, with the will to work for a lesser wage than the many Mexican Americans and, as a result, are viewed as a threat to the Mexican Americans’

economic stability. As mentioned before, they also come with an assigned stereotype with which many Mexican Americans do not want to be associated.

Massey, in *Categorically Unequal*, presses this point further when he discusses how Mexicans have been designated as a racialized other:

The degree to which Mexicans had been transmuted from masters of their own domain into a racialized source of cheap labor for whites is indicated by the Senate Dillingham Commission Report of 1911, which described Mexicans as “notoriously indolent and unprogressive in all matters of education and culture” and doing dirty jobs fit only for “the lowest grade of nonassimilable native-born races,” though their “usefulness is ... much impaired by [their] lack of ambition and [their] proneness to the constant use of intoxicating liquor.” (118)

Even though this report is 100 years old, it is still reflective of what some Anglos think of the Mexican immigrant today, and as of late, I have often observed Mexican Americans’ deliberate disassociation with this stereotype.

In response to their feelings regarding Mexican immigrants, many Mexican Americans have been active supporters of anti-immigration laws, and they do so with their own interests in mind. Following the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848, even though they were promised equality under the law, they quickly learned that they were intended to be second-class citizens. In this position, “their opportunities for economic advancement in the new political economy were severely circumscribed” (Gutiérrez 21). The foreign economy of the Anglos had no place for the Mexican Americans’ skilled occupations of that time, “such as blacksmiths, saddle makers, leather workers, vaqueros,

and *trasquiladores* (sheepshearers)” (24). As a result, most Mexican Americans were forced into the unskilled labor market, and this fact simply reinforced the Anglos’ negative stereotype about unskilled Mexican workers, while at the same time associating Mexican Americans with this stereotype. Because this was to be the foundation of the Mexican Americans’ livelihood, their “dog-eat-dog world” attitude is understandable. At this point many had no desire to be affiliated with a race the Anglos considered inferior, so whether it was true or not, they claimed to be of European descent, claiming a “Spanish fantasy heritage” (33) and ignoring any relation to their indigenous roots.

Historically limited to unskilled labor, Mexican Americans became extremely defensive when it came to sharing the job market with their immigrant brethren. According to Gutiérrez in *Walls and Mirrors*, when many Mexican immigrants began entering the United States in 1890 due to the negative social effects of the Porfirio Díaz regime, Mexican Americans became weary of the potential negative effects immigration would have on the economy (60). Specific concerns were the depression of wages, job and housing availability, and the fact that they would impede Mexican Americans’ progress in achieving better working conditions (60). Immigration, in combination with a historical animosity between Norteños and Mexicanos, and the Anglo’s prejudice against all that seemed Mexican, contributed to an animosity between Mexicans and Mexican Americans that begins from the nineteenth century to the twentieth and now into the twenty-first century. Gutiérrez confirms this animosity when quoting U.S. government economist, Victor S. Clark, on this relationship:

The attitude of Americans of Mexican descent towards immigrants from Mexico seems to be friendly, except where there is direct competition

between the two. In Colorado the former regard the latter as interlopers though they are not actively hostile to them ... In Texas, where there are no labor organizations among resident Mexicans, the latter oppose an influx of immigrants likely to lower wages; and in some cases they have lodged complaints of alleged violations of the contract labor laws. (60)

When LULAC and other similar Mexican Americans groups originally began to organize themselves, in the late 1920s and 1930s, they did so around the idea of creating social change for upward mobility. To achieve their goal, they put Mexican Americans first despite the negative effects on Mexican immigrants. They made positive strides for Mexican Americans; for instance, as Gutiérrez states, “[f]rom 1929 through World War II LULAC organized successful voter registration and poll-tax drives ... supported political candidates ... and ... attacked discriminatory laws and practices in communities throughout Texas and the Southwest” (78). History tells us that preceding the Chicano movement, 1960s groups such as these were not concerned with the civil rights and civil liberties of Mexican immigrants. Not until discriminatory laws like the Internal Security Act of 1950, the McCarran Walter Act of 1952, and Operation Wetback of 1954 were in place did the Mexican Americans speak out against anti-immigration laws. The activism on the part of Mexican Americans was not in support of their Mexican brethren, but rather, was initiated to protect themselves, as many “watched federal agents engage in massive sweeps of their neighborhoods” (153). Gutiérrez mentions that Mexican Americans perceived “that the government’s actions were also designed to rid the nation of vocal Mexican American ... labor leaders” (153). Even though they did not invite immigration, they became more aware of the U.S government’s intent to use legislation

as a tool to achieve whatever was convenient for Anglo society, similar to the manipulation of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.

Mexican American and then Chicano activists pressed forward from this point on, laying the ground work for future civil rights legislation. Their purposes differed, and neither group supported a permeable U.S.-Mexican border, but both over time became more empathetic about the Mexican immigrant's situation. While Chicanos embraced the roots of their indigenous past and Mexican Americans continued to work within the system, they both spoke out against laws that oppressed illegal immigrants. Both insisted that immigrants have a right to establish themselves legally rather than be deported to Mexico. The Community Service Organization (CSO) is an example of cooperation between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. In 1948, before the East Los Angeles municipal elections, its efforts were concentrated on "nonpartisan voter registration and education drives, neighborhood improvement, legal advice, youth activities, health screening and referral, and legislative advocacy at the local and state levels" (Gutiérrez 169). La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), a Chicano political organization, also supported the right of Mexican immigrants to legally establish themselves in the United States. As Gutiérrez states, "In July 1972 LRUP issued a statement in California describing undocumented workers as refugees from hunger and called upon the government to issue a blanket amnesty to those aliens already in the United States" (193).

Currently, there are still many active Mexican American and Chicano organizations. Most claim their origins in the 1960s and the 1970s when the Chicano movement was most active, but according to José Ángel Gutiérrez, the identity of these organizations is changing. Gutiérrez is a founding member of the Mexican American

Youth Organization (MAYO) in San Antonio in 1967 and a founding member and past president of La Raza Unida Party. According to his on-line article, “The Chicano Movement: Dead or Alive?” the “famous four” Chicano leaders, including Cesar Chavez, Reyes Tijerina, Corky Gonzales, and Gutiérrez himself, are either dead, dying, or no longer active. He believes that as the followers of the Chicano movement are also aging, the movement in its original form is coming to an end. He expresses that even though Latino and Hispanic organizations have not made strides of their own, they have picked up where the Chicano movement left off and show great promise for the future. What I found most interesting is that he pointed to Latinas as the movement’s future. Chicanos were predominantly men as the movement began, but through time and activism, women have surpassed their male counterparts in education and professionalism. In the realm of literature, I have found that to be true, as they have made a distinct place for themselves in the Chicano or should I say Chicana genre of literature. Gutiérrez closes his essay by stating that

[t]he destiny of Chicanos, Mexicanos, Hispanics, and Latinos in the U.S., as in other parts of the globe, will be in the hands of females in the years ahead. Perhaps, the women that take the leadership mantle in the U.S. will produce a Chicano-like generation that will paint the White House brown and become the governors and not allow being the governed evermore.

(“The Famous Four”)

It is clearly important for Mexican Americans and Chicanos to remain active, culturally, socially, and politically, in order for social change, as it has to do with race and ethnicity, to continue. The differences among Mexicans and Mexican Americans are

a barrier and at times inhibit progress, but these differences can be overlooked as they have obviously been in the past. History has shown us that more is achieved when Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos work together. In addition, if Mexican Americans, while making strides for social change, work closely with immigrant communities, they will have a better chance of knowing who they really are.

#### IV

##### A CAUSE RATHER THAN A PERSPECTIVE

In order to better explain the sometimes volatile differences between Mexicans and Mexican Americans, I have utilized much of this thesis to define and contrast these closely related groups of culturally related people. But I have also spoken several times of another people - the Anglos. Who are Anglos, and what does the term Anglo mean? Over time, the definition of this term has changed. According to *The New College Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary*, the word Anglo is defined as someone who is English or someone from England. This dictionary goes on to mention that if it is accompanied with the word American, Anglo-American, it is referring to an English American (51).

However, the dictionary goes on to state, “In contemporary American usage, Anglo is used primarily in direct contrast to *Hispanic* or *Latino*. In this context it is not limited to persons of English or even British descent, but can be generally applied to any non-Hispanic white person” (“Anglo” def.). This added perspective to this definition thus currently refers to Anglos as the white race, thus representing an attempt to separate those that are white from the rest, even though many of Mexican and Hispanic descent are indeed “white,” that is, light-complexioned, however, with many Mexicans also exhibiting indigenous physical traits – not light-complexioned. So the term Anglo, at least in the United States, is no longer just used to reveal a person’s place of origin. In addition, the term Anglo points specifically to the contrast between a Hispanic person and

a non-Hispanic white person. Why is it so important to make this distinction? And for whom is such a definition important?

Perhaps the answers lie in Gómez's before mentioned explanation of the "one drop" rule where any Mexican, who possessed "one drop" of Spanish blood, over a century ago in New Mexico, could claim a degree of "whiteness" (Gómez 37). This thesis has already explored the reasoning behind this rule as it was used to create a false harmony between Anglos and members of the newly created Mexican American elite, a harmony in which they shared an "equal" political and social status. This false harmony should be emphasized here, as it was solely a ploy to ensure less resistance from the "new" Mexican American elite in what eventually became the state of New Mexico (but also elsewhere in the Southwest). At this time, those Anglos representing the US government later decided to take away territory from the new Mexican Americans. It was never the Anglos' intention to share a racial status with the Mexican Americans in New Mexico and elsewhere. Following the Anglos' successful deception of Mexican Americans in New Mexico, they no longer had the need to bestow a white status upon them. Evidently, if one considers the contemporary usage of the word *Anglo*, there still seems to exist a necessity to differentiate between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic white person. I suppose this distinction could be viewed in more than one way: Is it the desire of Anglos to maintain this racial separation, or is it that Mexican Americans want to distance themselves from the oppressive Anglo race? I believe both of these questions can be answered affirmatively but not simply.

By observing social events occurring in today's society and relating to the treatment and status of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, I think it should be obvious to

most that we still face many challenges posed by racism. Some Anglos are still uncomfortable and sometimes quite hateful when life necessitates them to associate with people of color whom they consider beneath them. This kind of social behavior is most often due to ignorance, the same ignorance that inhibits them from acknowledging that Mexicans and Mexican Americans are not one and the same. As for Mexican Americans, I believe some associate better with Anglos, while some do not. Referring to my arguments in the previous chapter, I want to restate that some Mexican Americans, in order to better assimilate into the American mainstream, adopted the ways of Anglo society, thereby leaving the language and culture of their forefathers and foremothers behind them. Chicanos, on the other hand, did not and have not done so since at least the 1960s. Rather, they desired and still desire being close to their Mexican brethren, embracing the language and diverse cultures of Mexico.

In addition, the historically evident discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of the Bronze people have created a tension between Chicanos and Anglos as well as between Chicanos and those Mexican Americans who Chicanos perceive as “selling-out.” And what about Mexicans? I do not think that many have a desire to associate with the Anglo, but there is nevertheless still a question of a person’s white and non-white social status, in regards to the ratio of Spanish blood and indigenous blood a person may be said to have and which once again returns us to Gómez’s definition of the “one drop” rule. Like lighter-skinned African Americans, many lighter-complexioned Mexicans, especially those who are more affluent, will work to “pass” as Anglos.

Some time has passed since this rule was considered a deciding political factor, but the importance for some of racially differentiating among different peoples still exists

in U.S. society. Many if not most Anglos today still feel it important and necessary to differentiate themselves from others; however, they do not reciprocate when addressing Mexicans and those Americans of Mexican descent. To many Anglos, those Mexicans who appear “Mexican” are Mexican and from Mexico, regardless of their birthplace. This assumption, in my view, remains a contributing factor to much of the animosity and acrimony that continues to exist between Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

This thesis has so far been focused primarily on different ethnic perspectives, specifically the perceptions of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos. What would naturally follow here in this chapter is a perspective which focuses on the Anglo perspective, but this will not be such a chapter. I do not believe most Anglos, generally speaking, have a perspective on the difficult relationship being discussed in this thesis; most of them are, at best, seemingly indifferent to the subject. Most Anglos do not seem to spend much if any time thinking of the difficulties that exist among Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos. Do not misunderstand me: Anglos are still very involved in the conflict because their persistent racialized discrimination and exploitation of these peoples continue to fuel the fire of the antagonism which exists among peoples of Mexican descent. I am comfortable in making this conjecture, on the one hand, because I myself am an Anglo. Of course, I stress my use of the descriptive qualifying terms “some” and “most” when referring to Anglos, as not all Anglos are careless in regards to the strife and acrimony which continue to exist between these peoples. My interest in writing this thesis, to some extent, is proof that not all Anglos are intolerant and insensitive to the racialized realities faced by the various peoples of Mexican descent who have long resided in the U.S.

I have mentioned before that Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos generally share aspects from a similar heritage and culture, like traditions, religion, and language, and the value associated with these. But I have also revealed that these similarities are oftentimes a source of friction due to the different ways in which they are held and practiced. Presently, many Anglos find the culture shared by these varied peoples unimportant and obstructive because they feel that people of Mexican descent maintaining links to their Mexican heritage and culture inhibit those of Mexican descent from assimilating into mainstream America. It is the opinion of some Anglos that if “Mexicans” are going to live in the United States, they must behave as such, leaving behind their own ways and practicing the “American” way. I stress “presently” since this position has not always been the case, because at one time, the efforts of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to assimilate mainstream ways were not at all welcomed by most Anglos. It is therefore my intention to utilize this chapter to analyze how the historical and current discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos, at the hands of Anglos, have contributed to reinforcing racial tensions. The Anglos’ lack of respect for Mexican cultures, which these peoples share, clearly contributes to the animosity among people of Mexican descent.

The oppression, due to racial discrimination against Mexican Americans, began as early as the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 when Mexicans were formally made citizens of the U.S. In signing the treaty, the United States and Mexican governments guaranteed and in a sense agreed to the theft and dispossession of lands formerly held by Mexicans in these ceded territories and to their loss of any political rights. According to Martha Menchaca, in *Recovering History, Constructing Race*, the

treaty was supposedly meant “to protect the political rights of the conquered population. Tragically, within a year of the treaty’s ratification, the United States government violated these citizenship equality statements and began a process of racialization that categorized most Mexicans as inferiors in all domains of life” (215). Initially, the “new” Mexican Americans who appeared white remained lords of their lands and possessed certain political rights; whereas Mexican Americans of color did not. But the elevated status of white Mexican Americans was short-lived, because when their Spanish land grants were not honored by the U.S. government, they lost their property and with it their political rights as landowners.

Menchaca states that even before a year had passed after and despite the rights negotiated through the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, “the U.S congress gave the legislators of the ceded territories and states the right to determine the Mexicans’ citizenship status” (217). This fact is documented, as it relates to Texas, in Montejano’s historical landmark work, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*. About fifty years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, racialized tensions in Texas between “newcomer” Anglo commercial farmers and “old-timer” Mexican ranchers were high. As Montejano states,

During the 1910s and 1920s the old-timer Anglo-elite, allied with remnants of the landed Mexican upper class, found itself embattled by newcomer farmers who demanded public improvements, higher property taxes, an end to dictatorship, and the beginning of American decency. The newcomers charged the old-timers with fraud, with mismanagement of funds, with voting Mexican aliens, with bossism, with selling out

Americanism. The old-timers responded by saying that the newcomers were mistreating and intimidating American citizens of Mexican extraction and that the newcomers were fanning the flames of a potential “race war.” (133)

One particular outcome of this struggle, according to Montejano, was the division of farm and ranch land into separate jurisdictional zones. As a result, Mexican Americans living in the zones designated for “newcomer” farmers were disenfranchised. They lost their voice in the political arena and thereafter were considered inferior citizens.

These occurrences represented only a fraction of the political strife between the newcomer farmers and the old time ranchers, that is, between Anglos and Mexicans, respectively. The intent of the newcomers was to end the “patrón” system of politics in order to lay the groundwork for commercial farming. In addition to the disenfranchisement of Mexican Americans, the old time ranching style of the rancher vaqueros was ending, and upper-class Mexican American landowners began losing their land to commercial farming. Montejano emphasizes this forced change in a quotation by Jovita González: “In the Texas Mexican communities ... the once abundant folklore was ‘fast disappearing’: ‘The goat herds, the source of nature’s lore, are almost a thing of the past, the old type of vaquero is fast becoming extinct and the younger generation look down with disdain on the old stories and the traditions of its people’” (155).

As a result, since Mexicans and Mexican Americans were forced into wage labor, they fell victim to further exploitation. The commercial relationship that developed in the 1920s between farmer and laborer was distinctly different from the previous patriarchal relationship between vaquero and rancher. Because the human factor was no longer

important, due to the farmer's sole focus on business, segregation became an issue. To ensure productivity, Anglo farmers felt it necessary to organize and control Mexican labor. So it was decided that "physical separation ... was necessary to control the Mexican stranger; elaborate social rules were necessary to ensure that Mexicans knew their inferior position in the developing order" (Montejano 161). The racialized creation of two different towns within the same jurisdictional zone therefore resulted – an Anglo town and a Mexican town. The only point of contact was in the fields.

Mexican Americans could work as sharecroppers, but they were not given enough acreage to exceed the income of a migrant laborer, as a general idea was held by the Anglo landlord and farmer that a Mexican could have too much. Farmers did not want their laborers to excel in any manner, and in that way, they could preserve their cheap labor pool. Because farmers were so dependent on Mexicans and Mexican Americans for farm labor, these farmers were forced to tolerate what they considered social costs. Oppression due to labor exploitation manifested itself in racial discrimination. As agriculture took hold of Texas, the Anglo farmer realized a "significant Mexican presence" (Montejano 179). The extremely prejudiced stereotype that some Anglos still hold about people of Mexican descent is rooted in the Anglo farmers' response, back then, to what they considered a problem: "Politicians, educators, and concerned citizens warned that Mexicans were the cause of political corruption and fraud, the destruction of homogenous rural communities, labor problems, crime, disease, among other social problems" (179). Human nature's tendency to categorize, as Massey discusses in *Categorically Unequal*, combined with Anglo ignorance and caused Anglos to fret over the proper placement of Mexicans in society. They were not considered white or black,

and it was the Anglos' opinion back then that there was no place in between, and so it was forgotten that Mexicans were also human.

Regardless of the Mexicans' and Mexican Americans' ambiguous position in the racial order of Anglo society in Texas as well as in the American Southwest, Anglo farmers were headstrong about maintaining a cheap labor pool, but they were often up against great resistance. According to Montejano, in the 1920s the immigration question, as it related to agribusiness, surfaced. Growers desired a permeable border, but small working farmers and Anglo labor did not. They felt Mexican immigrant labor threatened their livelihood, even though Anglos strongly associated farm labor with Mexican labor and were less willing to be classed as "onion setters" (191) alongside Mexican workers. Despite the apparent stigmatization associated with farm labor, large Anglo growers wanted to ensure that the concerns of small farmers did not interfere with their labor reservoir. So intentional efforts to keep the Mexican down are what followed. It was apparently then decided that anyone of Mexican descent must be kept ignorant in most every way possible.

Given that there is no enumerated right to education in the U.S. Constitution, it is up to the states to guarantee that right. Utilizing Texas as an example, since Texas is the focus of Montejano's work, Article 7 of its 1876 State Constitution states that ". . . it shall be the DUTY OF THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools" (Texas Constitution and Statutes). As citizens of Texas, Mexican Americans had the right to attend schools and to be educated. But in 1919 Texas state law officials did not force

counties to follow legally mandated policies and proper procedures. As a consequence, according to Montejano,

Mexican schools were substandard, with inadequate supplies and poor facilities. Their Anglo teachers, who frequently shared the common Anglo belief about Mexican inferiority, received lower salaries than teachers at the “American schools.” School enrollment and attendance were never encouraged. Although state aid was determined on the number of school-age children in the district (thus assuring that all districts would count their Mexican school-age children), school boards had developed a practice of spending the overwhelming share of these monies on the “American schools.” Although these local practices and policies were violations of Texas law, state officials, generally did not intervene because, as one local official explained, they understood quite well that the counties were dealing with “the lower element.” (192)

Hence, the Anglo newcomers’ justification for racialized segregation was what was then called the “germ theory.” All people of Mexican descent were considered dirty, unsanitary, and sickly, so Anglos, having no desire to contract “germs,” refused to associate with anyone who appeared Mexican. Stigmatized, even Mexican Americans began to disassociate with Mexican immigrants. They thought that if a distinction could be made between themselves and Mexican immigrants, they would be able to elevate their position in American society.

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), in the 1920s, “saw itself ‘as a small nucleus of enlightenment’ for the rest of the Mexican community”

(Montejano 232). The organization emphasized to its fellow Mexican Americans that they should be clean, “speak English, dress well, encourage education, and be polite in race relations” (232) in order to assimilate into Anglo society. It seems clear that these Mexican Americans succumbed to the Anglos’ racialized ideas and stereotypes regarding “cleanliness, beauty, and respectability” (232). They indirectly supported Anglos’ segregation policies because they were trying to change themselves rather than stand up against segregation. Their actions fueled the Anglos’ intent to create a social class order based on “rich, clean, and loyal” versus “poor, dirty, and disloyal” (234). As a result, the campaigns, presented by middle-class Mexican Americans in the name of Mexican communities, were in reality only pressing for the rights of “respectable educated Mexicans [Americans]” (234), thus making the protests “class-specific” (234). These protests were to serve as proof that some Mexicans could be clean, specifically U.S. born Mexicans. The fact that Anglo segregation policies motivated Mexican Americans to create a distinction between themselves and their Mexican brothers and sisters emphasizes how Anglo behavior aggravated Mexican/Mexican American relations.

Mexican Americans like those associated with LULAC behaved in a similar manner concerning migrant farmworkers throughout most of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1962, the United Farm Workers Union was created in California in order to “gain collective bargaining rights and union recognition for Mexican American and Filipino farmworkers in California” (Gutiérrez 196). However, César Chávez, one of the founders of the UFW, stressed that unless the organization focused its energy solely on Mexican Americans and documented Mexican residents, they would not reach their goals of negotiating labor rights with the California growers against whom they were

organized. Because of its views concerning Mexican immigrant labor, the UFW supported strong control of the U.S.-Mexican border. The UFW was so extreme in its opinion that it went “so far as to report undocumented Mexicans farm workers to the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]” (197). As LULAC supported Anglo segregation policies in the 1920s, the UFW, in 1971, supported the Arnett bill. Introduced by State Assemblyman Dixon Arnett, the Arnett bill “would impose criminal sanctions against employers who knowingly hired an individual ‘not entitled to lawful residence in the United States’” (189). Once again, Mexican Americans used the Anglos’ treatment of Mexican immigrants as a stepping-stone to better their situation in the United States – at the cost of ostracizing Mexican National laborers.

In 1973, this particular issue of the UFW standing against Mexican immigrant labor stalled due to resistance from Chicanos and an organization identified as the Center for Autonomous Social Action, but this issue did not disappear. Anglos today continue to create trouble as can be seen in a current documentary titled *The Invisible Chapel*. Created by John Carlos Frey and completed in 2007, this film conveys an aspect of the undocumented Mexican workers’ struggle. The workers, all of them males, who were Frey’s focus for his documentary, worked in many different fields: construction, farming, and landscaping. But it is not their work that was the subject of concern – it was their open-air chapel. For twenty years, these migrant workers attended Catholic mass in an “invisible chapel” not far from a multi-million dollar housing development. With permission from the landowner on whose land the chapel was located, volunteers from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish would bring meals, medicine, educational materials, and religious guidance to these men every week. It was not until the subdivision grew larger

and neighbors began taking notice of the chapel that they began to have trouble with its presence and the presence of the Mexican laborers. Because permission had been granted for the use of the site, the opposing neighbors had to make a case to establish that the men attending this chapel were a threat. They did so by using inflammatory lies, which represent a repetition of similarly racialized tactics which Anglos previously used in the Southwest for more than a century and a half.

One woman in particular accused the Mexicans of multiple rapes and thefts within her neighborhood, even though no legal documentation was ever found regarding these accusations. In addition, the San Diego Minute Men, a highly discriminatory group who widely spread anti-Mexican sentiments, as well as the Voice of San Diego, represented by a local talk-radio host, together were involved in further exacerbating the situation. Ultimately, the undocumented workers were forced out. The owner of the property, due to political pressure, asked them, regretfully, to leave. The chapel was then demolished by the hands of those who built it. The representation of the Virgen de Guadalupe is all that remains, and she continues to act as the cornerstone of their parish, wherever they are forced to travel. In communicating with Frey, I have learned that currently the migrants worship in the same area in which they live, Deer Canyon, but that the details of the location remain unknown. They have chosen to remain clandestine since they fear that there may be trouble in the future due to the strong anti-immigrant sentiment in the area.

This documentary film exposes the hate some Anglos still possess towards people of Mexican descent. The actions revealed in this film are racially prejudicial. Until this film, I was unaware of the San Diego Minute Men whose mission statement, as listed on their website, reads as follows:

To demand maximum border security, oppose illegal immigration in all parts of San Diego County, and to assist the U.S. Border Patrol in securing the U.S.-Mexican Border from terrorists, criminals, drugs, and illegal aliens. We act on behalf of and in accordance with the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. We oppose the racist Atzlanders, Reconquistas, and all other anti-American groups and vow to expose their true agendas. (*UnitedStates*, screen 1)

While this group acts behind the shield of patriotism, I find them racists and cowards; the founders do not even list their full names on their website, only Jeff S. and Jeff M. Their website is highly provocative; perhaps they should have good reason to fear repercussions.

The film by Frey also reveals the homes of migrant workers, built in close proximity to the church with permission from the landowner, and which were vandalized at the same time that the protests regarding the chapel happened. The homes, roofed in plastic, were slashed with razors and torn down. The property within the homes, such as clothes and shoes, were also destroyed. These actions do not seem to be in accordance with the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights – they are hate crimes. Organizations such as the San Diego Minute Men and hateful Anglos, such as the Anglo woman portrayed in the film, mean to instill fear in their target of hate. With that in mind, it is understandable, not acceptable, that Mexican Americans would like to be identified separately from Mexicans. Not only do these hate groups act directly in preventing Mexican immigrants from crossing the border, but they also adversely influence Mexican American support groups that desire to give a hand to migrant workers similar to those

portrayed in the film by Frey. Thankfully, there are some, like the volunteers from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, who stand firm in support of the migrant workers.

Moreover it is not only migrant workers who suffer, but their children suffer as well. Both Mexican and Mexican American children who start school with a limited understanding of English face many challenges. U.S. public schools are no longer under the sole charge of Anglos. Today, most state governments and local school boards are somewhat diversified. But education is still primarily conveyed in English. Currently, there are several kinds of programs utilized in public schools to help English language learners succeed, including ESL programs, bilingual programs, and dual language programs. Some of these are more effective than others, but some are more oppressive than even those of previous, less enlightened times. I have had the opportunity to work in schools that have used two of these programs, an ESL program and a dual-language program.

My experience in an ESL classroom was extremely disturbing to me. The ESL class, entirely made up of non-English speakers, was taught completely in English, and the teacher was not required to know the native tongue of her students. As a result, the students were prompted, in my experience forcefully, not to use their first tongue. During my week-long stay as a substitute in this ESL classroom, at the kindergarten level, I witnessed an oppressive style of teaching where it seemed to me that the children were being taught in a manner that brought a negative connotation to their native language and their Mexican culture. This way of teaching seemed to imply that there was something wrong with being a Spanish-speaking Mexican. I found this appalling, especially since the teacher's aide was a Mexican American. According to the results of a recent study

posted on the website *Center for Positive Practices*, this type of teaching affects the children's self-esteem negatively: "Mexican American children who saw themselves as biliterates had the highest self-confidence as compared to monoliterates and oral bilinguals" (par. 3). This statement infers that students who are motivated to learn English while maintaining their native tongue benefit more from this approach over those who do not.

The dual language program, on the other hand, allows for biliterate results. Dual language classrooms include both English speaking and non-English speaking students, so teachers must speak both languages. It is also required that the class, typically at the elementary level, be taught in both English and the foreign language. In the case of Texas schools, the primary language used is typically Spanish. All students can benefit since in this type of classroom all students learn two languages. In this class, there is no right or wrong when a child speaks his/her native tongue. Learning language becomes an exciting process where the teacher flows easily from one language to the other. There is also a great feeling of respect in this class, a quality ESL programs often lack.

An explanation often given for why one teaching tactic is used over the other involves money and availability. An ESL website, *ESL Partyland*, conveys that there is not always the necessary availability of bilingual teachers to satisfy the schools' demand for Spanish-speaking teachers. The website also states that it is highly convenient, financially, for schools to certify their pre-existing teachers as ESL instructors. As a result, it seems more a question of money than of quality education, an issue that gives way to great controversy because of the debate over the allocation of resources.

Through various mediums, Anglos have historically abused and many presently still abuse people of Mexican descent. It is often this abuse that has motivated Mexican Americans to disconnect from their Mexican brothers and sisters. The Mexican Americans' actions, which could be considered tactics of survival, cause them to lose a significant part of themselves, including culture, language, and tradition. In addition, an opportunity to stand together against the Anglos' oppressive practices is lost. Consequently, the Anglos have succeeded in dividing a population that is quickly becoming a majority in many parts of the United States, like Texas and the Southwest. If one considers the actions of hate groups like the San Diego Minute Men, it could be assumed that this racialized division is intentional. In the past, the Anglos did divide Mexican Americans and Mexicans through the application of the "one drop" rule. I suppose it is idealistic to think that things could change as society becomes more cosmopolitan, but it is evident, on a daily basis, that this is not the case as widely as one would like to see.

As a fair-haired, blue-eyed Anglo, as a güera, I was not and have not often been subjected to racialized prejudice. I was also taught that racial or cultural prejudice was wrong and unacceptable. Growing up in a military family, I was exposed to many different cultures and languages and learned to enjoy the diversity of the world. Because of my experiences, I was unpleasantly surprised when returning, in the early 1980s, to our family's hometown, New Braunfels, Texas. Reentering this small town community as an older child, I could not believe the ease with which racial slurs escaped the mouths of its citizens. During conversations, I heard people use terms like "wetback" and "nigger"

without a thought of its acceptability. In truth, people of this community believed those they subjected to such racism did not mind their comments.

I know that traveling and the experiences I have had with racial prejudice, as a young girl and as an adult, have influenced who I am today. I must admit that those experiences have influenced my decision to write this thesis. I spend a lot of time wondering why people's differences give rise to prejudice, and that is why I find the animosity between Mexicans and Mexican Americans so curious and so disturbing. It is perplexing how two groups of people, so closely related, can be so estranged from each other. While utilizing texts that are historical, sociological, and statistical, I have begun to understand the roots of this present day struggle. But it is literary works that I find the most revealing.

## CLARITY THROUGH LITERARY WORKS

Several issues which directly affect the relationships between Mexicans and Mexican Americans (all discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis), such as cultural tradition, racial order, economic hardship, and immigration, all stand as barriers between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Each group forms a very different ethnic identity based on challenges relating to these problems. The challenges vary and are dependent on the particular group's region of origin. Mexican and Mexican American authors, through their writing, poignantly reveal the struggles of Mexicans and Mexican Americans and the various identities that grow out of those exact struggles. Because identity literature is so revealing, I have addressed and analyzed specific fictional works to show how college students, like myself, may identify with the subjects found in literary works by both Mexican and Mexican American authors.

In addition to their focus on ethnic identity, each work I analyze addresses different yet overlapping problems suffered by Mexicans and Mexican Americans who often deal with the same political and societal issues, but from different perspectives. Their perspectives and origins impact who they have grown to be. Literary works, and works of cultural criticism such as *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*; *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*; *Bless Me Ultima*; *Pilgrims in Aztlán*; *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*; and *The Crystal Frontier*, all address vital issues related to these groups. Through the use of their diverse characters, Mexican and Mexican American

authors of these works explore the complex issues that create political and social barriers for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. As a result, they clarify the variables connected to the ethnic identities of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and they show how these separate but closely connected people relate to one another. In addition, analyzing the overlapping chronology of when each work is set reveals common themes from the 1940s to the 1990s. If the documentary *The Invisible Chapel* is included in the analysis, the timeline can be extended as far as 2007. This continuum is revealing as it shows that the struggles faced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans as much as seventy years ago have largely not yet been resolved.

Octavio Paz's "The Labyrinth of Solitude," originally published in Spanish in 1950, begins by addressing this seemingly timeless struggle of Mexicans adjusting to life in the U.S. In this work Paz brings attention to the solitude of Mexicans. He discusses the causes of this solitude as well as how it affects Mexicans' views of the world around them. He conveys that the history before and after the Spanish presence influenced the Mexicans' desire for solitude, and he reveals as well that this long developed trait enables the Mexican to survive in the present day. In "The Pachuco and Other Extremes," Paz compares the private traits of the Mexican to the attention-seeking Mexican American whom he defines as a Pachuco, a kind of Mexican American identity that began being developed in the 1940s, in El Paso, Texas.

According to Paz, pachucos deny their Mexican identity by rebelling against Mexican culture and tradition. I mentioned in a previous chapter that the word "pachuco" represents a direct attack on the Spanish language, as it apparently has no actual meaning. But language is only a fraction of what Paz contributes to the "abominable" identity of

the pachuco, and he in fact devotes some energy to emphasizing the pachuco's manner of dress, the Zoot Suit, which is the pachuco's preferred uniform, an extreme style, according to Paz, without much comfort or practicality:

The pachuco carries fashion to its ultimate consequences and turns it into something aesthetic. One of the principles that rules North American fashions is that clothing must be comfortable, and the pachuco, by changing ordinary apparel into art, makes it "impractical." Hence it negates the very principles of the model that inspired it. Hence, its aggressiveness. (15)



*Fig. 6 Pachuco Style of Dress*

Paz focuses on the pachuco's clothing style to emphasize its "rebel without a cause" attitude. It is this attitude that Paz finds so offensive because he insinuates that pachucos abandon their culture just to be different, without purpose. In response to Paz's views, it is possible that Mexican Americans that identified themselves as pachucos were the source of their own struggle. They become unaware of their original ethnic self when they remove their culture like an old suit and adorn themselves in the uniform of the pachuco.

Since it was in the 1940s and 1950s that some Mexican American youths bore the identity of the pachuco, Paz's work can be connected to Tomás Rivera's novel *...Y no se*

*lo tragó la tierra/...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*. Even though it was originally published as a two language Spanish/English edition in 1971, Rivera's novel is set during the early 1950s. His novel, in its unique construction, includes various stories about migrant farm workers and is told through the dream-like visions of a child. In its original version, the novel's original manuscript also included a story about a pachuco, "El Pete Fonseca," but during its publication, the editors removed this story. Rivera states in the introduction of his work, *The Harvest*, a collection of short stories, edited by Julián Olivares, that the original editors of *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, suggested that "El Pete Fonseca" be excluded on the basis that "it was negatively sensitive for Chicano literature at the time (1970)" (75). "El Pete Fonseca" was formerly intended as a chapter in Rivera's novel but was cut by the novel's original publishers, and was much later included by Julián Olivares as a short story in the short story collection, *The Harvest*.

This short narrative, then, is about love and betrayal. As Pete enters the story, he is described as a pachuco by the children of the migrant workers, who first encounter him:

He took off his baseball cap and we saw that his hair was combed good with a pretty neat wave. He wore those pointed shoes, a little dirty, but you could tell they were expensive ones. And his pants were almost pachuco pants. He kept saying *chale* and also *nel* and *simon* and we finally decided that he was at least half pachuco. (Rivera 92)

New to the small migrant community, Pete Fonseca seemed only to be interested in getting work and making money. Shortly after his arrival, he meets a woman by the name of La Chata and pretends to fall in love with her, and he even goes as far as marrying her.

He proves his true intentions once the potato harvest is complete, as he takes off with their car and all their money which they had saved together, leaving her with nothing.

Even though the story provides a background and themes for the setting of the entire novel, ...*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, this short narrative depicts the pachuco in a derogatory manner. Rivera's depiction of Pete as an amoral character contradicts the general portrayal of the pachuco, in Chicano literature, as a rebellious proto-typical Chicano hero, hence its exclusion from the original manuscript which was transformed into Rivera's now classic Chicano novel.

Even without this story, Rivera briefly alludes to the identity of a pachuco in the chapter "The Night the Lights Went Out" from his novel *Tierra*. This chapter addresses the separation of young lovers due to their migrant work. This chapter also depicts the infidelity and tragic suicide that results from such an ill-fated separation. A young woman by the name of Juanita was required to travel to Minnesota with her family, but by doing so, she was separated from her very serious boyfriend Ramón. While in Minnesota she was unfaithful to Ramón, which she continued even after her return to Texas. According to Ramón's friends, "She was going around with some guy from San Antonio. He was nothing but a show-off and he was always duded up. They say he wore orange shoes and real long coats and always had his collar turned up..." (125). The description of this character alludes to his style of dress, in this case, a Zoot Suit that is often associated with the pachuco. When Juanita refuses to remain Ramón's girlfriend, Ramón, because he is enraged, kills himself by throwing himself against an electrical transformer: "The workers from the light company found Ramón inside the power plant that was about a block away from the dance hall. They say that his body was burnt to a crisp and that he

was holding on to one of the transformers. That's why all the lights of the town went out" (127). With this short story Rivera is able to connect the struggles of migrant workers to the identity struggle of young Mexican Americans. Juanita's seeming choice between a pachuco and someone who was not a flashy dresser literally kills Ramón, burning him to a crisp.

The struggles migrant farmworkers in Rivera's novel have extend beyond the difficulty of young people maintaining romantic relationships while migrating across the nation to find work to support themselves. Rivera's chapter "The Little Burnt Victims," for instance, reveals the poor living and working conditions of migrant farmworkers. The García family, a family of five, lived in a small shack up north. In other stories, Rivera describes these shacks as being old chicken coops; perhaps the place where the Garcías were living was just such a shack. There is very little room in these shacks for this family. When the García parents worked in the agricultural fields, they had to leave their children behind in their shack, as the owner would not allow children in the fields with their parents. On one such occasion, the children were playing as boxers, a game they often played with their father because their father thought one of his sons could become a boxer and earn money and fame from this sport. Part of the game entailed rubbing their bodies down with alcohol, but the time the children chose to play without their parents around, a fire accidentally started:

"But how did the fire get started?"

"Well, poor things, the oldest, Raulito, started to fry some eggs while they were playing and somehow or other their little bodies caught on fire, and you can imagine."

“He must have rubbed lots of alcohol on them.”

“You know all the junk that piles up in the house, so cramped for space and all. I believe the kerosene tank on the stove exploded and ... that was it. The explosion must have covered them with flames and, of course, the shack, too.” (121)

This particular dialogue communicates the reality of migrant workers' living conditions. In addition, the conditions under which these particular migrants worked did not allow them to include and take care of their children, so the result was tragic. Migrants traveled in order to better their family's economic situation, but the outcome sometimes resulted in great loss and in this case, the loss of their children. Rivera also mentions, in other chapters, that at times the cost of travel, in order to obtain a job in the fields, far exceeds the workers' pay. As a result, the workers ironically lose money through their endeavor to gain money to support their livelihood as migrant farmworkers.

Extreme heat and the dehydration that results and which represent the extreme working conditions under which migrant farmworkers have to work are also partly at fault for the death of a child migrant farmworker in Rivera's chapter “The Children Couldn't Wait.” This chapter further emphasizes the conditions and the abuse migrant farmworkers would fall victim to. The particular migrant workers portrayed in this chapter are working for a man who wants to further exploit the laborers by not paying them for their work. The Anglo boss' rules for the workers was that no one, including the children, could take water breaks and that they must wait until the water was brought to them, no matter the extremity of the heat. If they were caught getting water, they would be fired without pay. As the chapter title suggests, the children could not wait, and as a

result, they created a plan to pretend to relieve themselves by a nearby water tank when in actuality they were going there to get water. The boss became wise to their actions and decided to scare a little boy who was drinking water from the tank: “What he set out to do and what he did were two different things. He shot at him once to scare him but when he pulled the trigger he saw the boy with a hole in his head. And the child didn’t even jump like a deer does. He just stayed in the water like a dirty rag and the water began to turn bloody...” (87). In this chapter the migrant farmworkers were treated worse than the boss’ cattle. They were treated inhumanely in order for the boss to get more labor for less money. This chapter exposes the exploitation at that time of migrant labor.

The importance of ...*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* does not solely lie in its content but also in the manner in which it was published. As I began this analysis of Rivera’s work, I briefly addressed its publication history, since it relates the omission of a particular story, “Pete Fonseca,” from the novel’s original manuscript. But another important change that occurred during the original publication was the language of the novel. It was originally written in Spanish but published as a two-language edition. It is important to recognize this change as language is a very important aspect of anyone’s cultural identity as well as being a cause which can signal racial prejudice. Had this novel not been published as a two-language text, its doubtful many readers in the U.S. would have read it.

Rudolfo Anaya emphasizes this point about language in his novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, and represents one of, the many issues which this novel addresses. The time in which it is set connects Anaya’s novel to Rivera’s as well as to Paz’s views concerning pachucos. Set in the 1940s, at about the time WWII was ending, this novel functions

autobiographically in various ways. Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya was born in 1937, and like the birth of this novel's protagonist, Antonio Márez, his birth was attended by a curandera. The similarities between Anaya's life and what he depicts in his novel continue as Anaya spent his early years in the rural village of Pastura, New Mexico, a town very much like Guadalupe, the one portrayed in the novel. Given that Antonio is Mexican American, Anaya reveals the manner in which he grew up through Antonio's experiences, and like Antonio, he was surrounded by the oral culture of his ancestors and learned about the farming practices of his village ("The Big Read" par. 1).

*Bless Me, Ultima* focuses on the Mexican American struggle for identity. Mexican cultural traditions, because they are factors of this identity struggle, are covered as well in this novel. As the protagonist Antonio attempts to understand his heritage and create his own identity, he struggles with many aspects of his Mexican cultural traditions. Many parts of his life are fixed in Mexican traditions, like religion, language, and his indigenous roots, but he lives in New Mexico as a young Mexican American just as WWII was ending. Given his situation, he is confronted by and confounded with many decisions that shape his ethnic identity. Included in these decisions is how he is to satisfy his parents' divergent expectations of him.

His mother and father are from two different worlds, from different cultures. His mother, a Luna, expects him to grow close to the earth and be a farmer as well as a priest. His father, a Márez, is a frustrated wanderer, always desiring to live freely, and who is also rooted to the earth with a wife and children. He shares his name with the sea, as he is a Márez, so, Antonio's father wants him to be free-spirited and live like a vaquero traveling from one place to another. Antonio, being one of six children, however, is

destined to be his mother's priest. María, the mother, watches her other much older three sons grow up and go to war, but then after their return, they move away, as is the tradition of the wandering Márez Family. Antonio, however, took his mother's desire to heart. He very much wanted to please her by becoming a man of God and learning to farm so he could watch over the farmers of the valley. As a result, he faced his education and religion with great seriousness.

Antonio's desire for "knowledge and understanding" (Anaya 74) excites him about school, but his inability to speak English and his discomfort over leaving his mother cause him to dread school, as he would feel "very lost and afraid in the nervous, excited swarm of kids" (57). His struggle with the mastery of English as his second language also symbolizes a similar struggle suffered by many Mexicans and Mexican Americans of the past and today. Montejano, in *Anglos and Mexicans*, discusses the importance LULAC placed on speaking English and obtaining an education. He mentions that it was the organization's opinion that if Mexican Americans achieved these goals, adopting them would elevate them in Anglo American society and further remove them from the negative stereotypes so often associated with the Bronze people. In the 1940s LULAC was highly active in their movement to secure a better position for Mexican Americans in Anglo society. The influence of this type of activism is evident in the emphasis Anaya asserts for the importance of Antonio's education.

Other highly controversial issues Anaya alludes to in his novel are the racialized segregation of the small town of Guadalupe and the racial prejudice exhibited within the schools. His references are indirect but nonetheless visible. On Antonio's first day of school, he is treated politely by his teacher Miss Maestas, but he is laughed at by many of

the other students. They find him different due to his inability to speak English as well as due to the traditional Mexican lunch his mother packs for him: “a small jar of hot beans and some good, green chile wrapped in tortillas” (Anaya 58). He leaves his classroom on the first day due to the prejudice his classmates convey, and he finds two other boys, George and Willy, who also sneak out of the classroom during lunch. George and Willy are from a segregated area of town referred to as the farms of Delia. Antonio finds comfort in forming a connection with these boys since they share a similar language and culture. Joined together, they feel less of the dreaded loneliness that accompanies them to school. Due to these less than ideal circumstances, they form a kind of identity.

Segregation is evident once again when Antonio, the Anglo drama teacher, Miss Violet, and Red, a classmate of Antonio's, leave school during a severe snowstorm just before Christmas. Upon asking his teacher if she wants to be accompanied on her walk home, Miss Violet declines as Red usually walks with her. One can infer that Antonio's teacher and his classmate Red live on the *other* side of town, not far from the Anglo Methodist church, “‘Red will walk with me,’ she said. Red lived down by the Methodist church and Miss Violet lived just beyond, so they could walk together. Miss Violet was not married and I knew she lived with her mother in a house that had a high brick wall around it” (Anaya 158). Until the 1970s, segregation was a norm in small New Mexican towns. According to Gómez,

The vast majority of smaller New Mexico communities had few Euro-Americans, and in those with a more sizeable Euro-American presence, Mexican Americans and Euro-Americans lived in separate areas (if not separate towns), attended separate churches, and so on ... [so] it is clear

that Mexicans and Euro-Americans lived virtually segregated lives. (84-85)

Gómez's description is similar to what Anaya conveys about the town of Guadalupe in *Bless Me, Ultima* during the 1950's.

Even though racial segregation is not such a major problem as it was decades ago, Spanish-speaking children still struggle today with issues detrimental to their identities as Mexicans and Mexican Americans due to racial segregation. Forced assimilation and cultural oppression are still evident in some of the educational language programs designed for teaching English as a second language. As I mention in the previous chapter, ESL programs are oppressive since they contribute to the strangeness and uneasiness that Spanish-speaking children experience. Each child's self-worth and ultimately their identity are negatively affected when they come from homes built upon Mexican cultural traditions and values and placed in classrooms that force students to leave their culture behind them as well as to embrace something new and scary. To some extent, Antonio in Anaya's novel is being subjected to a comparable prejudicial approach.

Catholicism as another central element of many Mexicans' identity was also a great focus in Antonio's life. He is six as the novel begins, so the first Holy Sacrament he can knowingly take part in is his first communion, as he was only a baby when baptized. At the age of eight, he began catechism classes and was consumed with the idea of taking God into his mouth. He was sure the sacrament of the Holy Communion would reveal to him all that he does not understand about life. With the weight of his parents' expectations for him to become a priest and his great desire for learning and understanding the world around him, he is overwhelmed by the hardships associated with

growing up. As he states, “Oh, it is so hard to grow up. I hoped that ... the taking of the first holy communion would bring me understanding” (Anaya 74). But on his special day when he takes the body of Christ in his mouth, he feels nothing and understands nothing more than he did the moment before his first communion. This realization causes him to question his faith, so as a consequence; he becomes more susceptible to believing in the idea of the existence of other gods.

Before his First Communion Antonio would meet Samuel, a schoolmate, who reveals to him the unknown world of the golden carp. Through a mythological story,



*Fig. 7 The Golden Carp*

Samuel relates the story of the golden carp’s birth to Antonio. He tells him of the people who first settle the valley under the guidance of their gods. These people suffer through forty years of drought, and as a result of their hardships, they eat the forbidden carp that lives in the river, but the people as a consequence are turned into carp as punishment. All of the gods but one wanted to kill the people, but upon hearing

the request of one merciful god, the people are turned into bronze carp. The savior god feels sad for the beautiful bronze carp and requests permission from the other gods to join his people and swim in the river as a carp so he could protect them. The gods grant his request, and as Samuel reveals, “because he was a god they made him very big and colored him the color of gold. And they made him the lord of all the waters of the valley”

(Anaya 81). Antonio, shaken by this story because it causes him to question his faith, states that “If the golden carp was a god, who was the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong god?” (81). Later in the summer, between his first and second year of school, he actually gets to see the golden carp with another friend named Cico. He realizes then that this god is undoubtedly real; it could be seen and touched, unlike the Christian God that he must honor by blind faith. As a result, when he is disappointed by the Sacrament of Communion, his thoughts go to the golden carp.

Not only does the story of the golden carp shake Antonio’s Christian identity, its polytheistic quality ties him to his indigenous ancestors of Mexico, the Aztecs. Other elements of his Mexican heritage are prevalent throughout the novel by way of the character Ultima, the *curandera*. *Curanderismo*, a prevalent part of Mexican culture, is defined as

the art of folk healing by a *curandero*, the healer par excellence in the folk medicine practiced by Texas Hispanics. Healers can be either male or female and may even specialize in their practice. The three most common types of *curanderos* are the *yerbero* (herbalist), the *partera* (midwife), and the *sobador* (masseur). Though the *curandero* has the skill to treat a wide variety of illnesses, he is the only healer in the culture who can treat *mal puesto*, illnesses caused by witchcraft. He is thought to have been given a *don de Dios* (a gift from God) to heal the sick, and he learns his healing art through apprenticeship under another *curandero* or a spiritual manifestation. His chief adversary in the struggle between good and evil is Satan and those who have made secret pacts with him—the *brujos* or *brujas*

(witches). Along with the treatment of *mal puesto*, *curanderos* also treat *mal de ojo* (the evil eye) and *susto* (loss of spirit). Typically, the *curandero* works on three levels, the material, the spiritual, and the mental. He may prescribe a herbal remedy or conduct a religious ritual. Quite often, a practitioner is called upon to treat the physical symptoms that patients believe come from supernatural causes. (“Curanderismo” par. 1)

Ultima, in Anaya’s novel, possesses an extreme likeness to this description. As the novel progresses, Antonio develops a close relationship with Ultima. She takes him on as an apprentice, as she believes he has a gift. While under her wing, he is exposed to many experiences that could be considered too complex for a boy of his age to understand, like the healing of his uncle who suffered from *mal puesto*, an illness caused by witchcraft. In what seems very much like an exorcism, Ultima utilizes Antonio’s purity and mystical quality to help expel the *mal puesto* from his uncle’s dying body.

Ultima’s perspective on life is very different than that of Antonio’s parents. She sees the beauty and peace of nature and lives close to the earth. She, however, teaches Antonio about these qualities of life and does not rush him to grow up in any particular direction like his parents desired for him. She states, “‘Ay, hijito,’ she chuckled, ‘Do not trouble yourself with those thoughts. You have plenty of time to find yourself’” (Anaya 41). Ultima conveys to Antonio that it is for him to decide who he wants to be, regardless of the pressures placed on him at home, school, and church. Antonio’s struggle is ultimately the Mexican American struggle for identity. His identity as a Mexican American, nevertheless, is dependent on all of these family influences as well as on the broad and deep influence of his Mexican cultural heritage. Anaya’s exploration of these

influences is not unique, as many other Mexican and Mexican American authors also explore these influences.

Miguel Méndez, a Mexican American raised in Mexico and author of *Pilgrims in Aztlán*, carries the continual identity struggle of Mexicans and Mexican Americans into the Vietnam War era. An amazing man, Méndez was born in Bisbee, Arizona in 1930 but later moved to El Claro, Mexico, due to the political pressures to leave the country that were directed at Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. His education was minimal, as he only attended school through the sixth grade. Afterwards, he was his own teacher and gained knowledge on his own through reading and writing. He became an accomplished professor and a writer (“Miguel Mendez Biography” par. 1-2).

He has authored many works of Chicano fiction including *Pilgrims in Aztlán*, originally published in Spanish, in 1974, but completed earlier in 1968. This novel uses intertwining stories, and in each segment, through the protagonist Loreto Maldonado, a former revolutionary, he discusses the various challenges Mexicans and Mexican Americans face. Some of the specific topics Méndez addresses are the involvement of Mexican American’s in the Vietnam War, the difficult relationship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and the still current issue of the many problems associated with crossing the border and immigration.

The Vietnam War was both difficult and tragic for all involved, but the struggle of minorities, including African Americans and Mexican Americans, was unique. For this particular study I draw attention to the Mexican Americans’ struggle in this war. During the Vietnam War another battle was being fought, this one domestically in the United

States, as represented by the Mexican American fight for civil rights in the Chicano movement, which was primarily concerned with fighting to defend the civil rights of Mexican Americans. Because Mexican American soldiers were fighting for the United States in the Vietnam War, it is ironic that at the same time, Mexican Americans were fighting to defend their equal rights as citizens of the same country they were fighting for. Méndez conveys this irony through the words of his character Choni, who is speaking to his good friend Pánfilo who has just lost his son to the war: “And I brought him with me, buddy, truly believing that leaving Texas, a prison for our people, would allow us to warm a corner for ourselves here where we could live like human beings. And now they have taken your son away, only to bring him back dead. Damn sons of bitches” (173). The direct reference to human beings is poignant, for it reveals that the fight for equality is only rewarded by the death of a son, just as depicted in Rivera’s novel during the Korean War.

Méndez’s point is emphasized by Ernesto Cienfuegos in “La Raza: The “grunts” of the U.S. Armed Forces,” where he discusses how Mexican American soldiers suffered racial discrimination at the hands of Anglo soldiers during the Vietnam War:

Mexican-Americans and Chicanos were dying in such large disproportionate numbers in the jungles of Vietnam that it generated great massive anti-war demonstrations in the Mexican-American community. These demonstrations in turn generated extreme repressive measures against the Chicano anti-war activists culminating in the killing by police forces of a number of civilians that included the murder of a popular Los

Angeles Times Mexican-American journalist by the name of Ruben Salazar. (Cienfuegos par. 7)

Cienfuegos points out the racism Mexican Americans underwent when they were supporting their fighting brothers in Vietnam. (This article interestingly enough connects with Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, a literary work that is a subject of this study.)

Méndez continues by emphasizing humanity, through his reference to immigration. Currently, there is so much political rhetoric spent on immigration issues that the people are forgotten: but Méndez however, makes them his focus. He tells a story of two friends trying to make it across the Sonoran desert to reach and then cross the U.S./Mexican border so they can find work as farmworkers. They are both suffering from hunger and thirst, one holding the other up, as one friend can barely walk due to the sores on his feet. During their struggle to reach the border, they attempt to keep each other's spirits up through hopeful thoughts of life in "Gringoland" (46), but only one makes it to his final destination. Here is a short excerpt of a conversation between the two migrants:

"Come on, don't give out on me, take heart. I can't hear you. Here, let me get closer to you. What are you trying to say? Gerardo? Who's Gerardo?"

Ah! I'll ask him to look after your family, yes, will. Dear Lord, you're gone now, pal." (45)

The immigrant who does not succeed in his journey evidently has a family that depends on him for financial support. The purpose of his trip is to better his economic situation for himself and his family, but in his effort to get ahead, he is lost.

Immigration, as it relates to the U.S./Mexican border, is still a current issue. On October 16, 2010, *National Public Radio* reported that even though the number of people crossing the U.S./Mexican border illegally is down, there is still a substantial amount of dead bodies found in the Sonoran desert: “Authorities have discovered 252 bodies in the Arizona desert over the past year the remains of migrants who died trying to cross into the U.S. illegally” (Robins par.1) The article goes further and explains that the numbers are this high due to the new border fence, technology, and an increased number of Border Patrol officials. These changes along the border have caused migrants to look for alternate and more dangerous routes that will take them across the border, “places where sore feet or a broken ankle can mean death from dehydration or exposure” (Robins par. 3).

Mendez addresses another issue in his novel, the relationship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Two Mexican American travelers pass the Mexican immigrants on their way from Sonoita, Arizona, and they only speak negatively of the Mexicans’ appearance and complain about their smell: “They stank to high heaven like dogs that’ve been dead three days” (45). One of them is more merciful than the other one and suggests they offer the migrants a ride. But his companion only responds by applying the stereotype that all Mexicans are untrustworthy, dangerous, and violent. They decide that the Mexicans have created their own problem and that they should not therefore be helped. As I explain in earlier chapters, indifference such as this is a contributing factor to the animosity that exists between Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Méndez expands on this social relationship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans in a story about a Mexican and Mexican American involved in a heated

argument that turns violent. In a dialogue that follows the fight, the Mexican explains his reasons for fighting:

“Why’d you slam into that guy so hard?”

“Because he’s soldout. You know what? That guy’s a fucking Chicano.”

“Hey buddy, take it easy. Hit me, will ya?”

The guy says he doesn’t understand. “A light, then.” He doesn’t know Spanish. “A match, jerk.” The guy answers, “Don’t bother me, I don’t speak Mexican.” And so I yell at him, “You’re a coconut, a sell-out, brown on the outside but white on the inside.” The guy came at me like a truck. Look how he left me.”

“Just because you called him a coconut he got mad?”

“Right he is one of those Chicanos who set up shop then act like an Anglo. You know? They’re called coconuts because they’re brown on the outside and white on the inside like Anglos. Get it? They’re also called brown Anglos, and they’re real ashamed of who they are.” (68)

Méndez in this dialogue utilizes the term Chicano to identify Mexican Americans. Even though the identity of Chicanos/as is being defined differently than this study has established the Chicano identity to be, it is effective in pointing out the Mexican perspective on Mexican Americans. Mexicans, identifying Chicanos as sellouts, due to their attitude towards Mexicans, coupled with their preference of English over Spanish, affirms their previously established ideas regarding Mexican Americans. This negative

relationship also reveals a social order where Mexican Americans place themselves above Mexican migrants.

I have made a great effort to establish the difference in identity between Chicanos/as and Mexican Americans. In analyzing Acosta's autobiographical novel, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, I further emphasize what can be made about this difference in ethnic identity. Due to its autobiographical nature, the novel by Acosta, when coupled with previously established historical facts, provides a more complete understanding of the realities that constructed the Chicano movement. Acosta previously published *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* before publishing *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* in 1974. Otherwise known in the novel as the Brown Buffalo, Acosta, was a Chicano lawyer that represented Chicano militants in LA. As a boy, he struggled with his identity due to his cross-cultural upbringing, but he continued to struggle as an adult. Before his involvement in the Chicano movement, he wanted to use his talents, as a lawyer, in a more effective manner. For a time he also directed his focus on writing. His search for a story to involve himself in led him to the Chicano Movement.

Even though he was finally involved in a cause that could make a difference, he continued to struggle to gain his bearings as a Chicano, a struggle more fully illustrated in his previous autobiographical "novel." He felt that his position as a lawyer caused him to be unjustly immune to the consequences of Chicano activism. He nevertheless was very much a player, but the only negative consequences he suffered were due to his being found guilty of contempt in court. Perhaps his so-called immunity enabled him to be the powerful charging buffalo he appeared to be in the courtroom. Even though the cases in Acosta's tale are only somewhat fictionalized, they bring important issues to light.

Buffalo's cases, identified by the identity of the defendants, the East LA Thirteen, the St. Basil Twenty-One, and the Tooner Flats Seven, address many volatile issues that fueled the Chicano movement, including racism in the public school systems, corruption within the Roman Catholic Church, and the corruption of the federal court system.

The first case that challenged Buffalo grew from political corruption. Thirteen Chicano militants were arrested under the pretense of motivating the East Los Angeles school strikes that occurred in March of 1966. What caused these arrests to be suspicious was that the actions were not excessive and the arrests were not made until two weeks after the actual strikes. Buffalo concluded that the "arrests just happened to coincide with the California Primary. This will make both those guys look bad because they have come out publicly in support of you" (54). The "guys" Buffalo is referring to are Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, both Democrats running for U.S. President against Richard Nixon. It is inferred here that the arrests were a political setup created by Nixon as the director.

There are many factors involved in this particular act of corruption, which was intended to disrupt the campaigns of the Democratic candidates, but the corruption also was an attempt to retard the Chicano movement, as it marred the reputation of the candidates who supported Chicanos. It particularly interfered with the Chicanos' stance against racism in the public schools. During a demonstration in support of the East LA Thirteen, Buffalo reveals the truth behind the government's actions against the East LA Thirteen:

Would the government go to this extreme simply because we want better schools, better teachers, better administrators, because we want the books,

the teachers and the materials to reflect our own culture? Are we such a threat just because we have demanded a compliance with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which provided for a bilingual society? Is there something wrong with speaking Spanish in our schools? But when you stop and think about it, that is exactly why they are in jail on this monstrous prosecution. (60)

In the end, the thirteen accused were not convicted, but the demonstrations their arrests motivated were powerful forward strides for the Chicano movement.

The case involving the St. Basil Twenty-One followed. They were arrested during a protest that took place in the St. Basil's Roman Catholic Church located in the city of Los Angeles. St. Basil's is a multi-million dollar structure built under the guidance of Cardinal James Francis McIntyre. According to Buffalo, it was built for an elite Anglo congregation from Beverly Hills with the intent to exclude all "brown-eyed children of the sun" (11). The protest there was intended to be peaceful, but violence erupted. In Buffalo's attempt to explain the militants' actions to the concerned Mexican American community of East Los Angeles, he states,

"we aren't against religion we're not attacking religion"... "it is the power of the church, the administration of funds. We want the church to become more democratic. We want them to become more active in social action programs. These people make up the Church. They should be the ones to control it." (79)

His statement explains the motivation behind the protest as well as, the corruption within the Roman Catholic Church which at that time was incredibly affluent, wealthy enough to

build St. Basil's Catholic Church for the Beverly Hills' rich, while ignoring the plight of the poor in East LA. Given that religion is a substantial aspect of the identity of people of Mexican descent, its involvement in the Chicano movement was desired in an effort to effect positive change. This specific protest connects Acosta's work to the actual efforts of *Catolicos por la Raza*, an organization that I mentioned earlier in this study.

According to Acosta, what originally started out as just another Chicano protest, focused on the Vietnam War, turned into a battle between police officials and Chicanos. What followed was both rapid and extreme. Tooner Flats was in flames, Zanzibar (Ruben Salazar), a Chicano journalist, was killed, and seven Chicano Militants, including Corky Gonzales, a prominent Chicano leader from Denver, Colorado, were all arrested and faced life sentences. These militants became known as the Tooner Flats Seven, and because of their activism, "they were indicted by the Grand Jury on felony charges of Arson, Firebombing, Inciting to Riot, and Conspiracy. In addition, Corky and another man were also charged with misdemeanor gun possession" (Acosta 209). The Tooner Flats case, very complex in reality, was utilized by Acosta in this novel to reveal the corruption and racism in the federal court system. In this case, Buffalo takes the opportunity to point out the racist actions of various federal judges. The trial goes on for a year, and eventually, all of the defendants are found not guilty, with the exception of Corky, who was convicted of a misdemeanor for a gun possession charge.

As I alluded to earlier when discussing Méndez's work, Cienfuegos connects the novels *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and *Pilgrims in Aztlán*. The novels are tied together as they both discuss the Vietnam War and the Chicano movement, and his article emphasizes this connection. They are two different events but are nonetheless very

similar. From Cienfuegos' perspective, the demonstrations by Chicanos/as were motivated by the disproportionate number of deaths of Mexican American soldiers in Vietnam. Acosta's novel portrays a march down Whittier Boulevard to protest against the burning of peasants in Vietnam. Additional likenesses in Acosta's novel to actual historical events of this time are the deaths of Chicano journalists. Cienfuegos' article reveals the death of Ruben Salazar, but Zanzibar is the name of the journalist identified as being killed by the police in Acosta's novel. Regardless of the differences, the protests were centered on racism, the victimizing of both Mexican American soldiers and Vietnamese peasants. The similarities in the names of the publications must not go unmentioned. *La Voz de Aztlán*, which published Cienfuegos' article, bears a striking resemblance to the newspaper *La Voz* which Acosta portrayed in his novel.

The date, when *La Voz de Aztlán*'s article by Cienfuegos was published, September 2002, calls attention to the Mexican Americans' undying struggle for civil rights as they attempt to move forward in mainstream "America" while at the same time struggling with the Mexican aspect of their identity. A work of short stories titled *The Crystal Frontier* by Carlo Fuentes emphasizes this continuum, as it reveals a more contemporary Mexican perspective on "America." Originally Published in Spanish in 1995 and then again in 1997 in an English version, this work captures Fuentes' perspective as a Mexican from a privileged class. Given that he has lived and worked in Mexico and the United States as well as in numerous other countries, he is able to efficiently capture the animosity Mexicans feel towards Americans, including Mexican Americans. Specifically Fuentes addresses the abandonment by many Mexican

Americans of their culture of origin and exposes the “American” capitalism that leads to the exploitation of the Mexican laborer.

In the story “Spoils,” Fuentes draws attention to the lack of culture in the United States by mocking “American” cuisine. The protagonist of this short story, Dionisio “Baco” Rangel, is described as a world-renowned chef of Mexican cuisine. Dionisio, a highly opinionated man, conveys that “American” cuisine is of the lowest status, not a far cry from the opinion he has of the country and its people. Fuentes utilizes this character’s opinion of “American” cuisine to communicate his perspective on all that is considered “American.” Dionisio’s belief is that “National cuisines are only great when they arise from the people” (Fuentes 59). But by remembering what is said about “American” cuisine, one can conjecture that Fuentes doubts that anything good can come from a people with such a questionable identity. Gringos are so cut and pasted together that their origins are lost to them, and his opinion of Mexican Americans, regarding their origins, is not so different.

Fuentes’ narrator further presses his protagonist’s point when addressing the issue that the United States identifies itself as America, thereby usurping the name of an entire continent as its own:

Dionisio happily gave to that single country the name of an entire continent, gladly sacrificing in favor of a name with lineage, position, history (like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Nicaragua ...) that name without a name, the ghostlike “United States of America,” which, his friend the historian Daniel Cosío Villegas said, was a moniker like “The

Neighborhood Drunkard.” Or, Dionisio himself thought, like a mere descriptor, like “The Third Floor on the Right.” (65)

If the reader chooses to analyze this story in such a way that the references include all that is “American,” including Mexican Americans, it can be inferred that Fuentes shares in the Mexican perspective that considers Americans of Mexican descent as a people without land or culture. But without direct textual evidence, however, Fuentes’ views concerning Mexican Americans cannot be definitively laid out.

The title short story “The Crystal Frontier” focuses on another unattractive feature of the United States, “American” capitalism. Fuentes reveals, in an exaggerated fashion, how big business on either side of the US/Mexican border, operating under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has exploited Mexican nationals. Don Leonardo Barroso is characterized as a successful Mexican businessman in Fuentes’ short story. The narrator explains that Don Leonardo, shortly after NAFTA went into effect, addresses both the US and Mexican governments about the exportation of Mexico’s most valuable product – its labor:

Don Leonardo had begun lobbying intensively to have the migration of Mexican workers to the United States as “services,” even as “foreign trade.” The dynamic promoter and business man explained, in Washington and Mexico City, that Mexico’s principal export was not agricultural or industrial products, not assembly-line products, not even capital to pay the external debt (the eternal debt) but labor. Mexico was exporting more labor than cement or tomatoes. He had a plan to keep labor from becoming a conflict. Very simple: simply avoid the frontier. Prevent illegality. (168)

So Don Leonardo's idea enabled Mexican nationals to earn one hundred dollars for two days' work while U.S. companies saved twenty to thirty percent on labor by flying the workers from Mexico to New York on Friday night and returning them to Mexico on Sunday night.

Even though the wage was highly beneficial for the workers, the program was not designed in their best interest, as it was intended to preserve inexpensive labor for the U.S. companies. This conjecture is confirmed by the lack of care the program demonstrates when it did not inform the workers of the extremely cold temperatures in New York. As a result, the Mexican laborers were unprepared, bringing with them no coats or winter provisions, thus further emphasizing the self-serving exploitation of Mexican laborers by both Mexican and U.S. companies. If one chooses to connect Octavio Paz's views regarding "American" capitalism with that of Fuentes, the endless animosity between Mexico and "America" is once again in view. Definitely less satirical than Fuentes but also directed at "American" capitalism, Paz decades before discusses the infamous dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. He may have had many other reasons to do so, but Paz, in "The Labyrinth of Solitude," criticizes the Díaz regime because despite the improvement of commerce, railroads, the public treasury, and industry, "the doors were open wide to Anglo-American capitalism" (128). This action of allowing the entrance Anglo American capitalism into Mexico appeared to be an attempt to bring Mexico closer the modern world, but it was ironically a contributing factor to what Paz refers to as Mexico's return to a "feudal past" (130). It is Paz's opinion that even though Díaz and his gentleman supporters believed in progress, science, industry, and free enterprise, they

were not actually experienced industrialists or businessmen but, rather, were “landowners who had grown rich ... in the public affairs of the regime” (130).

During the Díaz regime, Mexico, for Paz and Fuentes, was not moving forward to a time when the civil rights of its citizens were honored, as they saw it regressing to a time of serfdom. In this particular instance, Paz does not directly point his finger to blame the United States with regards to the exploitation of Mexican labor, but the message is still clear. Díaz invited big business, and the US accepted his offer to “enslave” Mexican workers under the guise of progress, an action, as Paz states, that “could produce nothing except rebellion” (130).

The exploitation of Mexican migrant workers continues to be a problem today on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border. The documentary film *The Invisible Chapel* reveals the sometimes necessary living conditions of migrant workers from Mexico and Central American countries. The explanation the film gives for the plastic make-shift shacks is that they represent that the workers from Mexico, due to their comparatively low wages, want to make the best use of the money they earn; their lives are not in the United States; for most of them, their lives are still in Mexico. As migrant workers in the U.S., they continue to be victims of NAFTA and of American capitalism, just as others from previous generations have been comparably victimized.

Each author I have discussed in this chapter addresses in his work the vital issues that are the subject of this thesis. Through these issues they also address the issue of identity formation. When college students read, analyze, and write in response to literary works such as these, they develop a better understanding of who they are in relation to the complex issues facing Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. It does not

matter what ethnic identity the reader possesses, all readers can relate in some way or other to these struggles, especially since these struggles are still ongoing. Through the chronological linking of these works, it is evident that these problems seem endless. So, even without knowledge of historical facts pertaining to the Mexican and Mexican American struggle for equality and dignity, readers can still gain some consciousness by observing the continuum found among these literary works by Mexican and Mexican American authors. It is my wish that exposure to works of literature by these authors, as well as by authors from other ethnic groups who address the issues affecting Mexicans and Mexican Americans, will motivate further interest so students will pursue studying the history that is the substance of their writings.

## VI

### EPILOGUE

In the eighteen-month period it took to create this thesis, the relationship among Mexicans and Mexican Americans has continued to grow and change, as has my perspective. Previously, I was only aware of what lay on the surface of this highly complex issue. As the study began, the research solely revolved around reading. I explored historical, sociological, and statistical texts to get to the meat of the issue. Then later, I read literary works that emphasized my findings through artistic language. The histories allowed me a view I had not yet seen, as my previous education had not provided such a thorough and accurate account of the history related to this topic. The sociology and statistics provided me with a better understanding of current issues. All of these texts also confirmed some of my original ideas and, in doing so, helped to create a more concrete direction for my investigation. I found that I favored some books over others if their ideas were truly resonating with my previously held ideas concerning these two groups. Paz's collected essays about Mexican culture, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, collectively, was one such text, as it intensely explored the character of Mexicans during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gutiérrez's *Walls and Mirrors*, in its direct explanation of the very complex struggles of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, also proved very helpful in broadening my understanding of the relations between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. *Border Identifications* clarified the influence of origins on identity, and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* painted a graphic picture of the Chicano movement.

Paz's ideas in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* originally caught my attention because they brought to mind the private nature of many Mexican people. At one time I thought of the Mexicans I am acquainted with as quiet and reserved, but what I learned about Mexican culture, through Paz's work, is that there is wisdom in their silence. Paz's idea of the Mexican mask explains well this particular trait of many Mexicans. Paz believes that the mask is worn for protection and enables the Mexican to remain remote from the world and other people. As he states,

Unlike other people, we believe that opening oneself is a weakness or betrayal. The Mexican can bend, can bow humbly, can even stoop, but he cannot back down, that is, he cannot allow the outside world to penetrate his privacy. The man who backs down is not to be trusted, is a traitor or a person of doubtful loyalty; he babbles secrets and is incapable of confronting a dangerous situation.... Our response to tenderness and sympathy is reserve. (29-30)

I find Paz accurate in this respect, but the extreme quality of the mask differs depending on how traditional a Mexican is.

The severity of tradition, however, is quite dependent on origin. Perhaps a Mexican living in the regions along the U.S.-Mexico border would be less reserved, as the society in which he or she is living is influenced by the sometimes boisterous quality of people in the United States. Vila's study established how highly influential U.S. culture is in influencing the cultural traditions of Mexicans. Maybe the U.S. has also influenced the Mexican's quiet character. Since I inferred that there is wisdom in the silence of the Mexican, I must clarify that even a boisterous Mexican can be wise.

The effect of origins is very much the reason I found Vila's *Border Identifications* so interesting. Because Vila's study is based on how origin affects the "Mexicanness" of an individual's identity, it helped me to understand the extreme differences among native Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent. What provided the largest impact on my understanding of identity formation, though, was my realization that the United States was an influential factor in the decision, made by both Mexicans and Mexican Americans, of staying true to their Mexican culture. Vila's border study is revealing because it exposes the perspective of egalitarian Juarenses and traditional Mexicans from the south and central regions of Mexico. The former view southern Mexicans as backwards, while the latter view Juarenses as a people without culture. This point truly represented a moment of realization in my research. It seems that the relationship between Juarenses and southern Mexicans mirrors the relationships I have observed among Mexicans and Mexican Americans. As a result, Vila indirectly revealed what I was looking for – the reasons which help to explain relations between Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Gutiérrez in *Walls and Mirrors* took my revelation a step further by explaining why Mexican Americans have struggled so intensely with the Mexican presence in the United States. I found that issues like immigration and migrant labor were often the roots of the animosity Gutiérrez discusses in his study. He mentions that through his studies and personal experiences that he has found that Mexican Americans hold two distinct views regarding their relationship with Mexican immigrants. One is that Mexican immigrants are considered a threat; he further explains that

Individuals subscribing to this point of view generally acknowledged the deep historical, cultural, and kinship ties that bind Mexican Americans to Mexican immigrants, but, like some of my relatives, they believe that unrestricted immigration has undermined Mexican Americans' life chances by increasing economic competition and contributing to the reinforcement of negative racial and cultural stereotypes held by white Americans. (4-5)

He explores this point by discussing Mexican Americans who hold the second view. He explains that they choose not to acknowledge cultural similarities as ties but rather as divisive factors as, "the position advanced by these individuals ... tended to emphasize the social, cultural, and political distinctions that separate Mexican immigrants from American citizens of Mexican descent" (5). Finding such a direct explanation to my quandary helped me build the foundation of this research project. Through Gutiérrez's work, I gained a better understanding of how two closely related groups of people could be so estranged from each other.

Another topic Gutiérrez explores well in *Walls and Mirrors* is the Chicano movement. I only gained knowledge of this movement through certain works of Chicano literature. As a result, I had a minimal understanding of the struggle but no direct facts. With a better understanding of what makes up a Chicano/a ethnic identity, I gained a great respect for those who identify themselves as Chicanos/as. They know who they are. They accept their identity as people of Mexican descent and embrace the roots of their ethnic being, while at the same time being active in securing equality for the Bronze people in the United States.

Acosta, the Brown Buffalo, creates a very graphic picture of the Chicano movement in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Reading this novel enabled me to visualize the movement in all of its controversial dimensions, including Acosta's graphic sexism. In the afterword of this reprinted book, Acosta's son, Marco Federico Manuel Acosta, comments on how influential his father's work has become. Discussing both of his father's novels, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, he states that they could be "helpful for those seeking a history and understanding of the events during the sixties and seventies concerning the fight against racism, poverty, and oppression, particularly as it pertained to the Chicano community" (260). He also mentions Acosta's strident approach to life, a quality that enabled him to be the "fearless and committed fighter" (261) that he was, but which also may have been the cause of his mysterious disappearance in 1974.

I should also mention a specific aspect of Acosta's book. In his writing he is blatantly sexist, viewing women as sexual objects. Since I did not focus my research on gender relations, I did not dwell on this subject, but it should nevertheless be mentioned. There are several instances in Acosta's novel where his sexism is quite clear, but there is one in particular that is very telling. This incident occurred during a very public three-day fast that was meant to function as a non-violent demonstration in response to the negative publicity the Chicano Militant Catholics received and which resulted from the violence that occurred during the St. Basil protest. While Acosta is zoning out during his fast, three young Chicanas approach him and say they want to share his blanket. Acosta, much older, invites these teenagers under the blanket with him, where they share a joint and get

to know each other better. After the blanket incident, the girls want to live with him, and he agrees as long as they can cook and clean:

But for that night, while the winds rage outside our tent and the cars honk their horns and people yell insults to our demonstration, for that night I am filled with the youth of three cholas who want me to take care of them all. Can they stay with me after the fast? Are they welcome at my house?

“Can you guys cook?”

“Sure. I can make hot dogs and stuff like that.”

“Will you keep the house clean?”

“Rosalie knows how to clean house,” Madeline says.

“That’s good enough,” I say. “Now let’s smoke that last joint and get back to it.” (88)

The questions Acosta asks suggest that the girls are only useful if they can perform domestic duties along with the sexual favors they have already bestowed on him. The novel relates that Acosta’s relationship with these girls lasts for several months, but it does not mention the depth of their character. They remain shallow and subservient. In a novel that draws great attention to the struggles of Chicanos, it does not mention anything about the personal struggles of these Chicanas. This failure to highlight their struggles undercuts Acosta’s efforts to highlight the struggles which the Chicano movement sought to solve.

I have acquired copious amounts of information about the struggles of Mexicans and Mexican Americans and of the animosity between these two groups of people. But more importantly, I learned that this struggle seems without end. Many times during my

research, a discovery would open yet another door, thereby emphasizing its endless quality of the many complex dimensions which surround the interrelationships between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Racism, inequality, and the oppression that inevitably results still weigh heavily on our society. Until these issues are remedied, struggles such as these will continue. However, if one pays attention to history, it seems that humans will continually create hierarchies that support prejudice. I cannot say that there have not been improvements or forward strides, because there have been. And yes, the ever increasing right to speak out against injustice has allowed for these improvements. Hence, the great importance of identity literature, as it continues to tell the story of the oppressed and their oppressors, and will help by being a great voice of resistance.

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