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History from the Margins: Chicana/o History in the 1990's

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Professor, San Diego State University

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Artwork by

Nora Chapa Mendoza, March 1996

The **Julian Samora Research Institute** is the Midwest's premier policy research and outreach center to the Hispanic community. The Institute's mission includes:

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- *Provision of technical expertise and support to Latino communities in an effort to develop policy responses to local problems.*
- *Development of Latino faculty, including support for the development of curriculum and scholarship for Chicano/Latino Studies.*

History from the Margins: Chicana/o History in the 1990's

Chicano historians have crossed disciplinary, political, cultural, ideological, and psychological borders to develop a new kind of history outside the boundaries of traditional narratives in American history. Latino and Chicano sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists write and teach Chicano history. Chicano Studies is a multi-disciplinary field, and this has encouraged all of us to go beyond narrow academic specializations in our conceptualization of historical topics and approaches. If one defining characteristic of postmodernism is the tendency to transcend boundaries and categories, then Chicano history has become increasingly postmodern in the 90's.

In 1978, when I wrote my first book, *The Los Angeles Barrio*, and tried to get it published, I was told that it was a "crack" book. The publishers meant that it did not quite fit into the categories of publications established by the university press. It employed sociological methodologies to analyze historical data, but it was not clearly a sociology text. It was not Western history. It was not Mexican history. What was it? It fell between the cracks of these categories. The implication was that it would be hard to evaluate, market, and sell. In the parlance of the 1990's, it was a book that had crossed the boundaries not only between recognized sub-categories of American history, but also between methodological approaches. In the last 15 years many more works on Chicano history have fallen through the cracks and, as it were, filled up the void. As a result, where once there was no category, we have invented one: multidisciplinary Chicana/o history. In crossing boundaries we have created new borders.

Since 1990, there have been a number of historical works that have blurred the older traditional, intellectual, and disciplinary boundaries. Carlos Vélaz-Ibáñez's newest book, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest and the United States*, is one example. Vélaz is an anthropologist who writes history, sociology, art criticism, biography, and economics. The book is an example of border crossing scholarship that demonstrates how, in his words, "The borders of the mind, of cultural boundaries, of marginal identities are often disassembled and reconstructed in creative epistolaries..."¹ During the last

30 years Chicano historians have created a new history, one that has never been told before, one that challenges the accepted approaches and themes in American historiography. Since 1990, more than forty monographs have appeared contributing to the development of Chicana/o history (see bibliography). Surveying some of the best examples, we can discern the creative, multidisciplinary directions that Chicana/o history has taken.

Latina/o History

One boundary that has been crossed, in a limited way, has been the one separating Chicano nationalist historical consciousness and a wider reconceptualization of Latina/o history. In the 1980's, the only major historical effort to cross this frontier was the survey written by Gann and Duignan, a book that was not well received by the Chicana/o studies community.² In the 1990's, Jim Cockcroft and Hedda Garza sought to develop a Latino history, assuming that this multinational group shared a common heritage within the U.S. that included language, religion, *mestizaje*, as well as historical discrimination and resistance. Hedda Garza along with Jim Cockcroft authored a series of survey texts, written with a sharp social conscience, synthesizing a comparative history of Latinos in the United States. Hedda Garza's, *Latinas: Hispanic Women in the United States* is a sensitive and detailed portrait of the struggles of Latinas. Jim Cockcroft authored three other surveys, *The Hispanic Struggle for Social Justice*, *Latinos in the Struggle for Equal Education*, and *Latinos in the Making of the United States*. Each of these books is infused with a critical perspective while also highlighting the struggles of Latinos of many nationalities. These series should be better known to teachers at all levels, since they are very readable and of high scholarly quality. The series provides a useful corrective to narrowly nationalistic and overly pedantic histories of Chicanos. These studies present all the essential information a beginner needs to understand about the tremendously diverse experience of Spanish speaking people in the U.S. Unfortunately, other than these texts, there has not been any other attempt to conceptualize a Latino history despite the fact that the label of Chicano has gained a wider acceptance.

Literary History

Another conceptual border that has been crossed is that between Chicano literature and Chicano history. In the 1990's there have been three major efforts by Chicano literary critics to write historical analyses using the paradigm of discourse theory.³ Genaro Padilla wrote a landmark study of Chicano autobiographical writings where he sought to “deconstruct” historical narratives to reveal their hidden messages. Padilla's sensitive and very powerful work focuses our attention on sources of Chicano history such as the writings of Mariano Vallejo, *Californiana* women's narratives in the 19th Century, and the autobiographies of Rafael Chacón and Cleofas Jaramillo in New Mexico. He demonstrates that many autobiographical writings have exhibited a “discursive duplicity,” communicating different messages to different audiences. At the heart of many Chicano autobiographies there is a nostalgia for a lost homeland, along with many self-deceits and contradictions as the authors seek to maintain and sustain their cultural dignity in a hostile world.⁴

Rosaura Sanchez has also produced a literary critique of historical documents in her very impressive study of nineteenth century *Californio* narratives (Mexican land holders in California prior to 1848). Originally gathered by Hubert Howe Bancroft to help him write the history of California, hundreds of transcribed hand-written oral reminiscences of major Mexican historical figures in California have remained unpublished and largely inaccessible to the general public. Like Padilla, Sanchez seeks to interpret the texts, drawing from several theoretical discourses, primarily Marxism but also some of the most current thinking about ethnicity, racism, subjectivity and gender theory. She finds that the *Californio testimonios* are, in her words, “sites of counterdiscursive engagement, full of resentment and bitterness, written to protest and deauthorize hegemonic reconstructions of the past...”⁵ Sanchez's new approach is to show how *Californios* constructed their own sense of ethnicity and class. She sees their work as nothing less than a reconquest of Aztlan via the written word.

Both Padilla and Sanchez employ the terminology and concepts of discourse theory modified to allow for the non-textual realities of racial and class oppression. By crossing the boundaries between his-

tory and literature, they have generated very challenging historical analyses. While this development is exciting to the specialists who can appreciate how innovative their approach has been, the general student, and certainly the general public, will find the theories informing these histories difficult to grasp, frustrating, and confusing. With some simplification, however, their analysis can be applied by teachers and students of Chicano history.

There is another way that the fields of literature and history are being mixed to create new initiatives in historical research, and this is through the recovery, republication, and interpretation of rare and almost forgotten texts of Chicano history. Arte Público Press has launched a multi million dollar initiative to locate and republish the literary history of Hispanics in the United States.⁶ Not limited to Chicanos, Arte Público has republished fictional, biographical, and autobiographical texts of tremendous value to historians. A sampling of their publications in the 1990's gives an indication of the kind of work they are doing. The first novel published in English by a Mexican in the United States, *The Squatter and the Don* by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton; the autobiography of a border Mexicana revolutionist and founder of La Cruz Blanca, *The Rebel* by Leonor Villegas de Magnón; a retranslation and interpretation of the first written document about the American Southwest, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's, *Relación*; and a collective family biography of the famous Tejana singer, Lydia Mendoza.⁷ Beyond this republication effort Arte Público is also attempting to find, index, and collect all periodicals and newspapers published in Spanish in the United States. In the process they have assembled a massive bibliography that will be extremely useful to historians, and have published an anthology of critical essays to introduce us to the scope of the project.⁸

Mexico and Chicanos

During the 1980's, a significant historiographical development was the publication of history books dealing with Mexican - U.S. relations and the Chicano's emergence as a factor in this relationship. A number of Chicano histories were published in Mexico - literally crossing the border - thus Chicano history became more respectable among Mexican academic circles. My book *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* appeared at the end of this cycle in 1990,

attempting to fill a void in the historical scholarship about this important document. A significant contribution to Chicano-Mexicano history was James Sandoz' *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-1923*, an incisive study of the complex relationships between Ricardo Flores Magón's Partido Liberal Mexicano, various factions of the Mexican revolution, Tejano insurrectionist, and American authorities. Also noteworthy is Sandoz' elaboration of prior Chicano historical research on the Magonista movement in the U.S.⁹

In the 90's, however, fewer Chicano histories have appeared in Mexico. This phenomenon has been attributed to "la crisis," the high cost of paper and a shift in the political priorities of the Mexican government under Salinas. In 1996, the Centro de Investigación Sobre America del Norte published my bilingual edition of a survey of Chicano history since 1945.¹⁰ Entitled *Aztlan Reocupada* the volume set forth the thesis that Mexican immigration has been a major factor in the cultural and demographic reconquest of lost Mexican territories. It introduced to the Mexican audience the Chicano movement, as well as to the bursts of literary and creative energies north of the Rio Grande. Another Chicano history that literally crossed borders was David Maciel's anthology, *El Mexico Olvidado: La historia del Pueblo Chicano* a joint publication of the University of Texas at El Paso and La Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. This collection of translated essays covered the essential periods of Chicano history and developed a theme focused on the common interests shared by Mexicanos and Chicanos visa via the U.S. culture.¹¹ The strongest sections of the anthology dealt with labor and political history.

Many Chicano historians in the 90's have been interested in investigating how Mexican immigration has changed Chicano communities. David Gutiérrez's monograph, entitled *Walls and Mirrors* explores how immigration from Mexico in the 20th Century affected the evolution of Chicanos' ethnic and cultural identity. The battle between the mode of American assimilation and cultural loyalty to Mexico has raged through the decades, and immigration has been a catalyst for deep divisions within Chicano communities. Gutiérrez presents a complex and nuanced story of how Mexican immigration has been a factor in forcing Chicanos to reshape their cultural identity in one direction or the other.¹²

George I. Sánchez's study of Los Angeles in the 20th Century also seeks to explore the creation of ethnic identity resulting from immigration.¹³ He sees Los Angeles in this period as a cultural borderland where Mexican immigrants negotiate the creation of their own unique ethnic culture. Sánchez takes issue with those who believe that retention of Mexican cultural elements (such as customs, language and foods) should be the litmus test for ethnicity. With a post-modern sensibility, his history is guided by the view that ethnicity is a fluid historical creation composed of many contradictions and multiple identities. His is a venture across disciplinary borders, explicitly drawing on conceptual advances in literature, art, and anthropology to guide him in seeking to make sense of history's movement.

Another work that develops this idea - but from a larger chronological and geographical perspective - is the recently published survey by Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo de Leon, entitled *North to Aztlan*.¹⁴ Commissioned as part of Twayne's History of Immigrant America Series, the book is an attempt to document the economic and cultural exchanges between Mexicano immigrants and the native Spanish speaking settlers in the American Southwest. Threaded through the text is the assumption that the Mexicans belong in the region and that immigration from Mexico has been a process lasting hundreds of years. The guiding paradigm is that community building has been a joint effort between both immigrants and natives. A notable direction to this text, which spans the period from 1000 A.D. to the present, is the emphasis on cultural and Chicana history as integral to the story of community building. Hence we have, for the first time in a survey text, an attempt to integrate the Chicano literature, music, and the visual and performing arts as an integral part of the social and political history.

The theme of border crossing is an important one in Chicano history. A major turning point in the 20th Century history of Mexicans in the United States was the repatriation movement in the early 1930's. In this instance the border became, once again, a focus for pain and exile. The mandatory and voluntary departure of more than one million people during the Great Depression forced many Chicanos to reconsider their status as Mexican-Americans. It made American citizenship more valuable even while promoting organized protests of the violation of civil rights. With the exception of a pioneering study by Abe Hoffman

in the 1970's, there has been very little scholarship on this crucial period. In 1995 Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez published their book called *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930's*.¹⁵ The book gives a very detailed portrait of the moral and physical ways in which Mexican immigrants survived during the depression despite low paying jobs and discrimination. They were loath to rely on charity or assistance when unemployed, so they formed their own self-help organizations. What is new about this book is the amount of detail given about the traumas suffered by the *repatriados*. Thousands of older children who were citizens of the United States were forced to decide whether they should go and live in a country they had never seen, or stay behind without their family. Women without their husbands and children in orphanages were forced to be repatriated as well as people who were mentally ill. Often employed healthy citizens were coerced into leaving by government officials who threatened them with physical violence and unemployment. The authors relied on many oral interviews and Mexican government archives. Also of note is their description of the political activism sparked by the *repatriados* once they were in Mexico.

Auto/biographies and *Testimonios*

Many biographies and autobiographies are personal, individual accounts filled with revelations and intimate details. In the 90's there has been a noticeable explosion in the number of Chicana and Chicano *testimonios* auto/biographies that cross the boundaries between public and private arenas. The emphasis in many of these life stories has been to consciously relate an individual's life to collective experience, to go beyond the personal into the communal. As with other Latin American biographies, Chicano life stories have sought to escape the limitations of the personal by offering a *testimonio* or testimony of current events.¹⁶ The best example of this is *The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* by Mario T. Garcia. Corona's story as related to Professor Garcia is a fascinating tour of the memory and personality of one of the key Chicano activists of our era. Corona has been involved in most of the major events affecting Chicano history since 1930. In his *testimonio*, Corona gives us not only his personal recollections but also his analysis of other historical figures: Luisa Moreno, Josefina Fierro de Bright, César Chávez, Tijerina, Corky Gonzales, Ruben Salazar and scores of other important figures who made history. Corona

gives us invaluable insights into the workings of many Chicano organizations: El Congreso, MALA, the SO, and the UAW. As the founder and director of CASA, an important organization concerned with immigrant rights in the 1960's, Corona is more concerned with telling us about what was happening in the Chicano community during this era rather than what was happening in his personal life. For this reason, his *testimonio* is an invaluable document for contemporary Chicano history.

Another biography that transcends the personal and crosses boundaries into the public arena is the life of Maria Elena Lucas, entitled *Forged under the Sun/Forjada bajo el sol*, edited by Fran Leeper Buss.¹⁷ Maria Elena Lucas is a hitherto unknown disabled farm worker whose life story epitomizes the struggle of thousands of men and women who have toiled in the fields. As narrated to Fran Buss, Maria tells of her emerging political consciousness and resultant awareness of the ways in which sexism has shaped labor organizing. Having grown up in the Rio Grande Valley where the border is so important in reinforcing poverty and exploitation, Maria Elena came to question some elements of traditional culture, most notably those that justified violence towards women. Fran Buss incorporated into the oral history Maria Elena's own writings and poetry, which reveal her to be a woman of tremendous sensitivity and depth of feeling. Her poetry is rich in metaphor and symbol that serve to represent the spiritual and material conflicts of the poor. The personal drama she recounts is always related to the larger struggles of farm workers; her involvement with FLOC in the Midwest and with César Chávez and the UFW, her life as a single parent, and her deep devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe. This is a rare and extremely important book. It gives a voice, a face, and a tremendously engaging personality to Chicana farm workers, individuals who are not usually represented in any significant way in historical literature.

Another rare autobiography, published in the 90's, that literally crosses borders is *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* by Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez.¹⁸ Pérez's story is one that has been told in the abstract by sociologists, economists and public policy analysts. This is the first time that we have, in English, the life story of an undocumented immigrant told by himself. The personal history of Ramón ends by challenging the stereotypes and generalizations of the media and social scientists. His crossing of the

international border, and his apprehensive return to Houston are told with humor and a touch of dramatic exaggeration. His detached observations of American culture show a perceptive intelligence and wit that few Americans are willing to credit to Mexican immigrants. Indeed, the writing style and recollected conversations show that Ramón is a highly articulate individual. The adventurous and hard working Ramón provides through his writing a human face and personality to the loneliness and alienation that are reality for millions of migrants in the U.S.

In the 1980's, the tremendous critical and publishing success of the autobiographical novel *The House on Mango Street* indicated that childhood recollections offered unique opportunities for understanding the Chicana experience.¹⁹ In the 1990's, Mary Helen Ponce's *Hoyt Street: Memories of a Chicana Childhood* offered us a childhood memoir that was also a literary reconstruction. Ponce's book is based on a detailed visceral recollection and reconstruction of her family life and childhood in Pacoima, Calif., during the post war period. Collected as a series of short stories and vignettes drawn from her memory, this book was written, in the author's words, to "put to rest negative stereotypes." The period covered in her life is from about age 5 to age 13, the decade of the 1960's. Chicanos are presented as hard working, responsible, family-oriented people with very human emotions and dilemmas. This is the history of a happy childhood, and so de-emphasizes the tragic events that have come to be expected of Chicano coming of age stories.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is immensely engaging in its presentation, and speaks to one kind of Chicana experience that is widely lived in contemporary America.

Other major auto/biographies produced in the 90's worthy of mention include the aforementioned life of Lydia Mendoza.²¹ This work is a family autobiography, an oral history told by the members of Lydia's family, including herself. This technique of telling a life story collectively gives a tremendous richness to the narrative, presenting different perspectives on the same events. The book is perhaps the most complete and revealing autobiography of a major Chicana artist so far. Lydia had a long career as a singer in South Texas, and later in life in Mexico and Latin America. She was perhaps one of the first cross over artists; a Latina who was accepted in Mexico as a star. The book's discography is a tremendous resource to the hundreds of songs she recorded.

Also in the category of collective autobiographies is Oscar Martinez's book, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S. Mexico Borderlands*. Professor Martinez conceptualizes the life stories he wants to present in terms of border "types" — a sociological methodology that he integrates into a historical context. His typologies are complex and yet comprehensible because of the case histories he retells to illustrate their dynamics. The dramatic and mundane come alive here to illustrate the tremendous diversity of the borderlander's experience.²² With this work we have a historian who has crossed both international and disciplinary borders to create a new kind of book, a contemporary socio-history that has an application to current affairs.

Finally of note are two biographies of major figures in the Chicano movement, Ruben Salazar and César Chávez. Ruben Salazar was a Mexican-American journalist for the Los Angeles Times who was killed during the 1970 Chicano Moratorium demonstration. The book by Mario T. Garcia is a sample of newspaper articles and columns written by Salazar. In the introduction Garcia gives us the context for reading Salazar's journalistic work. He was born and raised on the border, in El Paso, Texas. He was the first Mexican-American reporter employed by the *Los Angeles Times* and the first Chicano to have a column published regularly in an American newspaper. Much of his writing was of an investigative nature, probing the horrible conditions of the El Paso jails, the educational problems facing Mexican-Americans, protest movements, and the complexities of Mexican-American ethnic identity and politics. He criticized the type of patriotism that excluded Mexican-Americans, and was honest about the problems Chicanos had with the police, with African-American politicians, and with the Democratic Party. Indeed, the major motifs of Salazar's writing are honesty, integrity, and a refusal to either idealize or cover up the truth. Garcia's conception of Salazar was that he was a "border journalist." This biography charts the evolution of his ideas, and shows how he crossed many boundaries between life in the barrio and mainstream America.²³ *César Chávez: A Triumph of Spirit* by Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia, published in 1996, interprets Chávez's life from more than one perspective: the personal perspective of those who knew him best (Dolores Huerta and his immediate family); the liberal and radical intellectuals who wrote articles and books about him; the students and leaders of the Chicano movement; and the

U.S. labor union movement.²⁴ Because Chávez's life spanned the Great Depression to our own day, the authors also tried to interpret his actions within the larger context of American and Chicano history. Indeed this is the first attempt to do so by Chicano historians. Ironically, Chávez's published story up until now has been the province of Anglo-American journalists and writers. This work attempts to deal with issues not dealt with in other biographies, such as the crises in the UFW leadership in the 1980's and the conflicts over undocumented immigration.

Labor History

Since the 1960's, one area of steady development within Chicano history has been labor history. Almost by definition, Chicano labor history has necessitated an analysis of Mexican immigration and working class culture. In the 90's, new books appeared that crossed disciplinary and conceptual borders and established new arenas of investigation. These were works by Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Gilbert González, Devra Weber, Camille Guerin-Gonzales, and Zaragoza Vargas.²⁵

The broadest vision is that of Gómez-Quiñones, who seeks to both summarize and critically analyze the social and political changes experienced by Mexican-American workers since 1970. His theoretical approach is very clearly stated as a series of questions based on a wide reading in labor theory. His synthetic history transcends the regional and chronological borders that have been established by scholars. His scope risks making large generalizations. Finally, Gómez-Quiñones declares that his intention is not merely to study the world but to change it by evaluating the strategies of the past and by providing a historical framework for change.

Gilbert Gonzalez's study of Mexican immigrant worker villages in Orange County is, in my view, the most original study on the subject thus far in the 90's. He has integrated cultural, social, and economic history within the framework of labor studies. Thoroughly studied local history informs his theoretical approach to cultural labor history. Gonzalez traces the rise and decline of the Mexican fruit picker villages and how they created a vital ethnic working class culture. Gonzalez develops several concepts in community formation: (1) the process of the layering of generations of Mexican immigrants and their chil-

dren (2) the conservative role played by the Mexican consul among Mexican laborers in the 1930's, and (3) the importance of rural areas as sites of cultural transformation. Gonzalez's study might be considered marginal to the traditional labor history, since only one chapter deals directly with labor union activity (the 1936 strike). Yet the importance of his approach is that it is more holistic, giving the reader a feel for the daily lives of the workers.

Devra Weber's study of the cotton strikes in California during the 1930's emphasizes more institutional history. She is concerned with correcting other stereotypes - namely the supposed passivity and helplessness of Mexican cotton pickers during this era. Weber's study concludes that, in fact, this group had a tremendously strong sense of community and family, which made them able to withstand economic hardships, and were the basis of their organizational life. Weber finds that the New Deal was a mixed blessing. Small cotton farmers were unable to benefit from the AAA, and ultimately the union's reliance on government intervention weakened their position. But the New Deal programs did provide a minimum wage for farm workers by providing relief checks. The federal government's labor camps were models of humanitarianism. Due to grower's political pressure, however, the federal labor laws ultimately excluded farm laborers from benefits. The New Deal was meant to institutionalize and moderate the conflict between growers and workers and thus to shift the farm worker's attention away from strikes and towards the political process.

Camille Guerin-Gonzales' study of Mexican farm workers is an attempt to decode the American Dream in terms of how it was understood by two constituents, the growers and the immigrant Mexican farm workers in the period 1900-1939. Using concepts suggested by postmodern theorists, she explores the conflicts between these two groups, and their differing visions of who was entitled to the material benefits of the American Dream. As might be expected, the growers interpreted the American promise in a way that justified the exploitation and exclusion of Mexican workers. The immigrants themselves believed in the ideals of inclusion and social justice. In their labor struggles they fought to redefine the American dream. Of particular importance is the book's analysis of the repatriation program in California as a defining event in the struggle.

Finally, Zaragoza Vargas' interdisciplinary study of Mexican midwestern industrial workers seeks to reinterpret Chicano labor history by making us more aware of the positive aspects of working class life. He emphasizes the complexity and variation in the experience of the Mexican immigrant workers in the Midwest. Vargas challenges the stereotype of the oppressed Mexican working class by offering a portrait of workers who valued their jobs and developed a very strong work ethic. Together with other ethnic workers, they challenged discrimination on the job. Vargas finds that Mexican workers were active agents in shaping their own lives, not helpless pawns of an oppressive industrial system.

Mestizo History: the Merging of Genres

As a salient characteristic of poststructuralism is heterogeneity, mixture, hybridization, and the destruction of boundaries and genres.²⁶ As suggested at the beginning of this essay, crossing boundaries and destroying borders in order to create new territory has been a prominent characteristic of Chicano history in the 90's. More than taking the border and its crossing as a subject for historical study, Chicano history is increasingly concerned with how the story is told: the positioning of the narrator with respect to the document and the audience. This self-consciousness has been present in Chicano Studies from the beginning, since we have always had to criticize the mainstream's omissions and biased constructions. In elaborating Chicano history, we are trying to create a new perspective on the past, one that reflects our interests and sensitivities. It could be said that the goal is to reach a mestizo vision of the past—mestizo in the sense of celebrating the mixture of theories, methodologies, genres, and approaches that can all be used to create history. But also Mestizo in the tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of life that has characterized the Mexicano experience. Three books published in the 90's best exemplify this kind of postmodern approach to history—breaking the boundaries between the old structures and reaching out to new areas of vital interest to our communities: *Racial Fault Lines* by Tomás Almaguer, *Barrio Rhythms* by Steve Loza, and *Anything But Mexican* by Rudolfo Acuña.²⁷

Tomás Almaguer is a sociologist who has written a comparative history of race relations in California during the late 19th Century.²⁸ What is new about Almaguer's approach in this book is the comparative

and sociological scheme. He analyzes the histories of Asian immigrants, Native Americans, and Chicanos of this period. Like Sanchez and Montejano, Almaguer argues that racial categories have been constructed by the interaction of structural and ideological factors. He does not subscribe to a historical materialist view of economic determinism, but is impressed by the ways in which political discourse can shape racial status. In this work, Almaguer—who in the past had been identified with internal colonialist theory—embraces the idea that “race, not class, became the central stratifying variable” in California's 19th Century history.²⁹ Almaguer specifically takes issue with those who think that a more complex but interrelated constellation of race, class, and gender explains the evolution of ethnic history in California. He argues for the primacy of race as a category because it was so pervasive as a term of discourse in this period. Almaguer finds that Mexicans were not at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in California but occupied an intermediate position. Asians, African-Americans, and Indians were lower in socio-economic and political status than Mexicans. This comparative work thus decenters an exclusive focus on Chicano oppression. It also contributes to the debate on race in America from a comparative perspective that includes Chicano history.

Steven Loza's book *Barrio Rhythms: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* is a perfect postmodern history incorporating history, musical scores, and ethnographies.³⁰ Beginning in the 18th Century, it is an amazing chronicle of the evolution of Latino musical talents in Los Angeles. The book tells the story of musical hybridization and fusion, detailing how Mexican and Chicano music has been open to the influences of many cultures and traditions. In the post war period, for example, Mexican rancheros mixed with Afro-Caribbean rhythms, which in turn mixed Hillbilly sounds and Negro spirituals. Blues, swing, salsa, jazz, mariachis, rock and roll, punk, rap have all influenced Chicano musical expression. Loza reminds us of the creative geniuses of the forgotten past, while integrating this story with political and social history. He includes ethnographic interviews with contemporary Chicano musicians to tell us how they were influenced by various musical traditions. These individuals relate fascinating stories of the creative struggles they have gone through. After reviewing the complex and varied history of Chicano music, Loza concludes that “Marginality

inevitably becomes the epitome of the mainstream.” In other words, the record supports the notion that music and art transcends borders.³¹ Loza’s optimistic vision is that Chicano culture will inevitably be integrated as part of a world culture that knows no boundaries. This utopian hope, expressed in the music of Carlos Santana, Los Lobos, and scores of other musicians, is a wonderful ideal that is worth cherishing as we continue with the project of creating a heritage for future generations.

Finally, Rudy Acuña’s latest book is a sweeping contemporary analysis of the recent history surrounding Los Angeles’ Mexican and Latino population. In this case, Acuña crosses the boundaries between journalism and history. This work chronicles the recent struggles of Chicanos in the nation’s largest barrio.³² The title *Anything But Mexican* conveys the radical, critical approach that has come to be Acuña’s style. He is a gadfly, defying the conventional liberal establishment with his acerbic and penetrating observations and opinions. The theme of the book is that Mexicans, Chicanos, and Latinos have been struggling against a racist, anti-immigrant ethos in Los Angeles; they have been less than welcome by the dominant powers and they continue to challenge efforts to placate them. The book analyzes in great detail the particular events that have formed the struggles. A sample of topics include: the fight over the control of Olvera Street, the hunger fast by students to establish a Chicano Studies department at UCLA, protests over Proposition 187, attacks on bilingual education, and police-gang violence. On each of these topics, and many others, Acuña marshals an impressive array of research gleaned from newspapers, census reports, government documents, and personal experience. In the process Acuña becomes a chronicler of the Mexicano/Chicano community, preserving for future historians events that others might tend to ignore or devalue. *Anything But Mexican* is local history but one that goes beyond journalistic impressions, interpreting the immediate present in light of a deeper historical context. This impulse, to make history relevant to the present day, is in the best tradition of Chicano Studies, showing the strength of history to critically examine a wide variety of subjects.

Conclusions

There are scores of other works that could be discussed as examples of a developing postmodern Chicano history. Two categories of Chicano history that in the past have been well developed are Political and Community history. In the 90’s there have been some fine works in this area, such as Juan Gómez-Quiñones’ *The Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940*, or Martha Menchaca’s *The Mexican Outsiders; A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California*, but there have been many more works published in the categories of literary history and auto/biography. It would seem that, in the 90’s, Chicano historical scholarship has been more active in cultural and intellectual analysis than in researching community and political issues.³³ There have been a number of excellent multi-disciplinary anthologies published that include significant essays in Chicano political history and that interpret major issues in Chicana/o cultural and intellectual history.³⁴ But their impact is diluted by the nature of anthologies. The major advance in Chicana/o historical scholarship in the 90’s has been in the careful elaboration of a view of the past which is sensitive to more than one perspective within a monograph book format. We have seen, for example, increased concern for the views of indigenous people and their interactions with Mexicanos, as in Douglas Monroy’s book *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*, Elizabeth Haas’ *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, and Ramón Gutiérrez’s *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*. This latter book has been the recipient of many prizes and is widely regarded as one of the best books published this decade.³⁵ Gutiérrez’s work is a sweeping and penetrating study of marriage and sexuality in colonial New Mexico, employing quantitative and qualitative evidence as well as anthropological evidence in dealing with the pueblo Indian people. Gutiérrez’s book is a perfect example of the tendency in the 90’s for Chicano historians to use multidisciplinary approaches and diverse theoretical constructs.

A major disappointment in the 90’s has been the lack of the development of books in Chicana history. There have been a few excellent edited collections of Chicana historical essays, such as Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera’s *Building With Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, and

Vicki L. Ruiz and Susan Tiano's edition *Women on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, but only a few monographs have appeared in the last seven years.³⁶ This lack of productivity is especially frustrating given the fine dissertations that a number of Chicana historians have written which have not yet been published.³⁷

When I last attempted to evaluate the nature of Chicana/o historical discourse in the 1980's, I concluded that there had been a tendency to focus more and more on the theme of conflict within the Chicano community.³⁸ This motif has continued in the 90's with a large number of works being concerned with the generational, class, and gender conflicts and differentiations that have made community and organizational histories more complex. It is not possible in the 1990's to talk about "The Chicano Experience" in the monolithic overtones it had some 20 years earlier. At the end of the 1980's, I thought that the demographic differentiation of the Latino population would impel Chicana/o historians to broaden their conceptualizations and become more comparative and inclusive in their writings. This certainly has not been a trend in the last seven years. The vast majority of Chicano histories still do not include non-Mexican Latino populations, although surveys do give some attention to areas outside the American Southwest. As was true ten years ago, there has been no dominant paradigm or political approach that has adequately characterized Chicano history during this decade. The diversity of approaches in writing history has produced a growing body of literature that has gone far beyond the initial conceptualizations of the field.

In my assessment 10 years ago, I was pessimistic about the future of historical creativity given the small numbers of Chicanos in graduate history programs, the lack of a historical journal on Chicano studies, and the lack of a professional organization for Chicano historians. This pessimism has proved unwarranted. The 90's has so far been a tremendously important decade for the publication of Chicano history. The future will depend, of course, on the younger scholars entering a field that, after almost 30 years, is now mature. I worry sometimes about quality, that illusive creative element that differentiates pedestrian writing from outstanding literature. I continue to admire the writing styles of W.W. Robinson, Charles Beard, Octavio Paz, and Luis Gonzalez y Gonzalez — writers of history who have inspired me to try to communicate better. Academic writing almost always fails to engage readers who are

not specialists. To be a successful field and to create a history that is actually read by people and influential in their lives, we need good writers of history, especially of local history. This means that academic writers need to have a better sense of audience — who is actually going to read and try to understand and appreciate Chicano history? The answer to this question will determine whether our field will expand its popular appeal or if it will remain largely as assigned text books for college students. Ideally, both markets should expand in due to the demographic shifts that are inevitably taking place. As writers we have an obligation to meet our public's demand for a history that is meaningful, relevant, and forcefully present. The final boundaries we have to cross are those between the reader and the writer of history, between the general public and the academy, and between the community and the intellectual.

Endnotes

- 1 Carlos Vélez- Ibañez. *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest and the United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), pp. 269-270.
- 2 L.H. Gann and Peter J. Duignan. *The Hispanics in the United States: A History* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986). This text was severely criticized by Chicano historians for its "right wing" orientation towards bilingual education and its criticism of the Chicano movement.
- 3 For discussion of the relationship between fiction and history see "The Historical Texas as Literary Artifact," in Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 81-100. The postmodern perspective that has been inspired by the French writers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault is sometimes called discourse theory or post-structuralism. The basic proposition is that ethnic historical narratives are decentering to the master narratives of the American conquest because they privilege silenced voices. For an example of how the post modernist perspective can be applied to history see my "Neither Activist nor Victim: Mexican Women's Historical Discourse-the Case of San Diego," *California History*, LXXIV, No. 3 (Fall 1995): 230-243.

- 4 Genaro Padilla. *My History Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (University of Wisconsin, 1993), 34, 229-241.
- 5 Rosaura Sanchez. *Telling Identities The California testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), p. 302.
- 6 The Recovering the Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, began in 1992 headed by Arte Público Press. This is a large-scale attempt to recover, index and publish lost Latino writings that date from the American colonial period through 1960. The Recovery Project has compiled a bibliography containing the names, titles, dates and places of publications and other information of more than 1,400 periodicals published by American Hispanics between 1808 and 1960.
- 7 Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita, eds. Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton. *The Squatter and the Don* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992); Clara Lomas, ed., Leonor Villegas de Magnón. *The Rebel* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994); Martin A. Favata and Jose B. Fernández, trans., *The Account: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993); Chris Strachwitz with James Nicolopoulos, comps., *Lydia Mendoza; A Family Autobiography* (Houston: Arte Público, 1993).
- 8 Ramón Gutiérrez and Genaro Padilla, eds., *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* (Arte Público, 1993).
- 9 James Sandos. *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904- 1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
- 10 Richard Griswold del Castillo. *Aztlan Reocupa: A Political and Cultural History Since 1945* (Mexico: CISAN, 1996).
- 11 David R. Maciel. *El México olvidado: La Historia del Pueblo Chicano*, 2 vols. (El Paso and Juárez: University of Texas and Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1996)
- 12 George I. Sánchez. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 13 George I. Sanchez. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 14 Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnolfo De León. *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).
- 15 Abraham Hoffman. *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974).
- 16 Mario T. Garcia, ed., *Memories of Chicano History: the Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (UC Press, 1994) has a good discussion of the testimonio, pp. 346-349.
- 17 Fran Leeper Buss, ed., *Forged under the Sun/ Forjada bajo el sol: The Life of Maria Elena Lucas* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994).
- 18 Ramón "Tianguis" Perez, trans. by Dick J. Reavis. *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1991).
- 19 Sandra Cisneros. *The House On Mango Street* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988).
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- 22 Oscar J. Martinez. *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1994).
- 23 Mario T. Garcia. *Ruben Salazar: Border Correspondent: Selected Writings, 1955-1970* (UC Press, 1994).
- 24 Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia. *César Chávez: A Triumph of Spirit* (University of Oklahoma, 1995).

- 25 Juan Gómez-Quiñones. *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (University of New Mexico, 1994); Camille Guerin-Gonzales. *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Gilbert González. *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994); Devra Weber. *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton and the New Deal* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1994); Zaragosa Vargas. *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1993* (UC Press, 1993).
- 26 See a brilliant exposition of post modernism in the Latino and Latin American context by Jean Franco, "Remapping Culture," in *Americas: New Interpretive Essays*, Alfred Stephan. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 172-188.
- 27 Tomás Almaguer. *Racial Fault Lines: the Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U.C. Press, 1994); Steve Loza. *Barrio Rhythms: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Rudolfo Acuña. *Anything But Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1996).
- 28 Tomás Almaguer. *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994).
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Steven Loza. *Barrio Rhythms: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
- 31 Ibid., p. 280.
- 32 Rodolfo F. Acuña. *Anything But Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*. (New York: Verso, 1996).
- 33 Juan Gómez-Quiñones. *The Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1994); Martha Menchaca. *The Mexican Outsiders; A community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California* (Austin: University of Texas, 1995).
- 34 Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera, eds., *Building With Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1993); David Maciel and Isidro Ortiz. *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic and Political Change* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Nicolas Kanellos. *A History of Hispanic Theater in the United States: Origins to 1940* (Austin: University of Texas, 1990).
- 35 Ramón Gutiérrez. *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
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- 37 Antonia I. Castaneda. "Presidarias y Pobladoras: Spanish-Mexican Women in Frontier Monterey, Alta California, 1770-1821" (Ph.d. Diss. 1990); Cynthia E. Cynthia. "The Origins of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement in Texas with an Analysis of Women's Political Participation in a Gendered Context, 1910-1929" (Ph.d. Diss. 1995); Emma Marie Perez. "Through her love and sweetness": Women, Revolution and Reform in Yucatan, 1910-1918 (Ph.D. Diss. 1988); Deena J. Gonzalez. "The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe: Patterns of their Resistance and Accommodation" (Ph.D. Diss. 1985); Valerie M. Mendoza. "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community in Kansas, 1900-1930," (Ph.D. Diss., 1997).
- 38 Richard Griswold del Castillo. "Chicano Historical Discourse: An Overview and Evaluation of the 1980's," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, Vol. 4 (1993): 1-22.

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