**INTRODUCTION**

The last three decades of the twentieth century constitute a period of extraordinary productivity vis-à-vis the documentation of all aspects of the historical experience, cultural expression and social praxis of Mexican-origin populations of the U.S. The pioneering scholarship produced by Chicana/o scholars during this period re-conceptualized the socio-economic and political experience and the cultural production of the multiple *mexicano* communities of the U.S.

It used and continues to use cutting-edge methodology to address issues of class, ethnicity, gender, race and sexuality, and in so doing challenges in a highly sophisticated fashion an academic and cultural hegemony which continues to see *México*, *mexicanos* and *lo mexicano* as irrelevant or inferior or marginal or all of the above. The oppositional scholarship, the paradigm-challenging research that characterizes Chicano studies came from the collectivity of intellectuals and scholars spawned by the Chicano Movement. Chicana/o scholars put themselves at risk professionally by challenging their academic mentors and sponsors, established disciplinal canons and methodologies and institutional policies and practices. Some did not survive; many function at the mar-

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No llegamos ayer
(y no nos vamos mañana)¹

Arturo Madrid*
gins of the academic enterprise; most are still waging a century-long battle for legitimacy and attention.  

Long before there was a field of study called Chicano Studies there were writings that focused on the experiencia (the historical experience) and the vivencia (the lived experience) of the people of Mexican-origin living in the United States, whether the latter were migrant workers, refugees from political and/or economic turmoil in Mexico or the descendants of those peoples who settled Spain’s Provincias Internas in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and who subsequently were absorbed into the U.S. as a consequence of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). The pre-Chicano Movement examinations of the Mexican-origin population fall broadly into three categories:

- Reconnaissance reports on the territory that went from being Mexico’s Norte to becoming the U.S. Southwest;
- Historical studies concerning the exploration and the colonization of the Provincias Internas of the Spanish Empire, which came to be known as the Spanish Borderlands; and
- Ethnographic studies of the cultural expression and the material culture of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. that grew out of compilations of data concerning Mexican laborers.

These three types of studies have multiple points of contact. All played a role in the evolution of Chicano Studies. All still shape popular as well as scholarly interpretations of the historical experience and the cultural expression of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. All continue to inform social and public policy in both Mexico and the U.S. And to one extent or another the legacy of these studies has been problematical.

THE DISPARAGEMENT OF TODO LO MEXICANO

Without a doubt the most problematical dimension of the experience of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. has been the legacy of denigration of all things Mexican (de lo mexicano) that has been a central aspect of Anglo-American interpretation to this day. This legacy was the product of a historical Anglo-American antipathy towards Spanish-Mexican society as well as of the rationalization that accompanied U.S. imperialism in the nineteenth century. It was driven by the descriptions and interpretations of the cultural makeup and expression of the Mexican population by Anglo-American travelers and spies both preceding and following the occupation of Mexico’s Norte. Mexicanos, whatever their class or cultural origins, and particularly those who were indigenous or mestizo were examined and judged to be inferior. These views and interpretations determined what the U.S. populace came to understand and believe; the basis on which policy was made; as well as the justification for the apartheid that subsequently informed societal policies and practices vis-à-vis mexicanos, whatever their civic or socio-economic status.

These tendentious interpretations informed subsequent early twentieth-century studies having to do with the foundational historical experience—the period of exploration and colonization under the Spanish Empire—of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. The scholarly studies of explorers and colonizers are fundamentally marked by a distancing process from the historical subject, one that essentially denies its relationship to the present. The former, i.e. the explorers, are exoticized in terms of a glorious Spanish imperial past; the latter, the colonizers, are frequently characterized as debased and/or degenerate. Only
the aspects of that past that could be romanticized —conquistadors, missionaries et al.— have been preserved, either as the stuff of tourism or the domain of antiquarians. As a consequence, the historical experience of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. in the second half of the nineteenth century was ignored, misrepresented, or dismissed as insignificant. Matters of conquest, subjugation, displacement and expropriation as well as violence against the resident populations were elided. The lived experience —la vivencia— of the Mexican-origin communities of the U.S. was distorted and its cultural expression denigrated. The only cultural expression given value was the one deemed to be Spanish and judged to be unadulterated by lo mexicano. 4

The first set of studies of a scholarly character on the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. grew out of efforts of U.S. and Mexican agencies to track a phenomenon that had multiple dimensions and major social, political and economic implications for both nations: the migration north of thousands of citizens of the Mexican nation in the early part of the twentieth century. 5 These studies were based on data collected on the demand for Mexican laborers: their numbers; the type of employment they obtained; their geographical distribution once in the U.S.; the conditions of their employment; and their income. Some of the studies had ethnographic dimensions. Although methodologically sophisticated, the ethnographies were fundamentally flawed in that they were reductionist, essentialist and normative. The norm against which matters Mexican were measured was Anglo-American society and culture. Vis-à-vis that norm and its essentialist ideological perspective, Mexican society and culture —and therefore all mexicanos— were profoundly lacking. The conclusions arrived at in many of these ethnographies were that Mexican values, traditions, modalities, etc. were retrograde and reactionary. Moreover, notwithstanding the differences in historical experience, ethnic origins, cultural traditions and practices and class construction among the various populations of mexicanos living and/or working in the U.S., the lines that marked those differences were frequently blurred. Their diverse historical and lived experiences (su experiencia y su vivencia) became conflated. All Mexican-origin people came to be imagined as recent immigrants; in addition, as destitute, despairing and deprived; and furthermore as undeserving of the opportunities, benefits and protections offered by U.S. society. 6

This twentieth century version of the nineteenth century legacy served to justify both the exclusion and/or marginalization of the historical experience and the role of mexicanos in shaping U.S. society as well as to rationalize the scapegoating of the Mexican population during times of crisis. During the Great Depression it justified dismissing anyone deemed to be “Mexican” from their jobs, denying them rights and protections, and repatriating thousands of persons, including native-born and naturalized citizens of the U.S. 7 During World War II it permitted exploitation of braceros, physical attacks on Mexican-origin population and public denigration of lo mexicano. In a trial that took place in that environment of the so-called Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943 and that involved various Mexican-American youths accused of a gang murder, the prosecutor presented and the presiding judge admitted into the trial record expert testimony to the effect that Mexicans, descended as they were from Aztecs, were by nature perverse, barbarian, murderous and bloodthirsty. 8
In brief, Mexico, Mexicans, y todo lo mexicano have been imagined over time and found wanting. Mexico’s historical and contemporary presence in the area known as the Spanish Borderlands continues to be dismissed. All persons of Mexican origin residing therein are to a greater or lesser extent viewed as newcomers and interlopers. Their cultural makeup is still viewed as lacking and used as justification for exclusion and exploitation. The disparities that exist between the Mexican-origin and larger U.S. population continue to be conceptualized as private problems informed and driven by cultural modes and historical ways of being rather than societal conditions created by social policies and practices and thus subject to being resolved or improved by appropriate public policy. These complications, and the contradictions they led to, have taken deep root. They are not confined to the past, but continue to confound us in the present. Mexico’s migrants continue to enter a space historically occupied by mexicanos and continue to be defined by the terms of the occupation of that historical space by Anglo-Americans.

**Setting the Record Straight**

Not all of the early twentieth-century studies of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. are tendentious or flawed. Among the students of the migratory phenomenon were the U.S. labor economist and activist Paul Taylor and the Mexican sociologist and statesman Manuel Gamio. Paul Taylor’s explorations of the deleterious effects that large-scale agricultural enterprises were having on the rural society of the U.S. led him inevitably to the examination of the agricultural labor force which in the West was already overwhelmingly Mexican in origin. Starting in 1928, with the publication of his study on Mexican labor in the Imperial Valley of California, Paul Taylor went on to document the working conditions of mexicanos in the agricultural sector throughout the U.S. over the next three decades. His research formed the basis for attempts to implement legislation to eliminate or attenuate pervasive exploitation and abuse of agricultural workers as well as for union organizing efforts.⁹

Manuel Gamio documented the numbers and deployment of the mexicano workers in the U.S. in his pioneering study, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (1930). Gamio was, moreover, concerned with the historical experience and the vivencia of mexicano migrants in the U.S., which he addressed in his book *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story* (1931). Deeply aware of the political and economic implications for Mexico of large-scale migration, he also perceived that the coming and going of the migrantes would also have a significant impact on Mexican society and Mexican culture. Thus his research not only documented the number of migrants, their diffusion and the remittances, but also provided information about their origins, their experiences and their views on various matters, including their opinions of their Mexican-American brothers and sisters.¹⁰

The studies of Mexican migration defined by Taylor and Gamio continue to this day and are principally marked by policy considerations. They reflect the desire of scholars, policymakers, labor leaders, political activists or persons concerned or charged with attending to migrants and refugees to understand the phenomenon and its implications for both Mexico and the U.S., whatever the arena. These types of studies are cyclical if constant, and are driven in large measure by the ebbs and flows of migration and by both push or pull factors, whether civil unrest, economic instability, political turmoil, labor shortages and demands or other factors. Notwithstanding the historical understanding and sophistication Gamio and Taylor brought to the subject, some of the prejudices and misrepresentations of their contemporaries continue to inform policy to this day.

Carey McWilliams published *North from Mexico*, the first popular historical study to lay out the cultural legacy of Mexico in the U.S, in the atmosphere of cultural denigration and political repression created by the Depression and World War II. In it he affirmed the connection between Spanish past and Mexican present, documented the history of injustices suffered by Mexican Americans at the hands of Anglo-Americans, described their struggles against oppression and gave the lie to the century-long campaign of cultural defamation of lo mexicano.¹¹

**The Challenge to Hegemony**

The publication of *North from Mexico* took place during a period in which there were also substantive challenges in the policy arena to segregation in employment, education and housing; inequities in the allocation of public resources and services; abrogation of rights and protections; denial of opportunities; and exclusionary practices in the institutional arena. Individuals
and organizations spoke out against discriminatory policies and practices and organized political and legal challenges to them. Some were groundbreaking, establishing precedents that African-American organizations used to challenge de jure segregation and exclusion.¹²

Out of one such struggle, over the educational inequities experienced by nuevo mexicanos, the Spanish-Mexican population of New Mexico, came a landmark policy study, Forgotten People, by George I. Sanchez, which argued that schools attended by nuevo mexicano children should be provided with equitable financial resources. George I. Sanchez also asserted that the historical experience of nuevo mexicanos and their cultural legacy were as much a part of the history and the society of the U.S. as those the descendants of original North European colonists or the immigrant populations that succeeded them.¹³

During the 1950s the dean of Mexican-American scholar-activists, Ernesto Galarza, laid the basis for follow-up studies to Paul Taylor's documentation of the exploitation of agricultural laborers. In his later books Spiders in the House; Workers in the Fields and Merchants of Labor, Don Ernesto documented the collusion between agribusiness interests and governmental agencies to maintain a pool of cheap agricultural labor, the epitome of which was the Bracero Program, a Mexico-U.S. government program that provided low-wage Mexican labor to U.S. enterprises from the 1940s until the 1960s.¹⁴

The scholarly cornerstones of what came to be known as Chicano Studies were two scholars who were immersed in the atmosphere of academic, cultural and intellectual defamation and denigration: the late Américo Paredes and Julián Samora. Paredes was a tejano, a descendant of the eighteenth-century colonizers of the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Samora was a nuevo mexicano, whose roots went back to the settlement of Nuevo México at the end of the sixteenth century. Both sought to respond to the hegemonic ideology and discourse that dismissed and denigrated todo lo mexicano, but especially to its reification in academic scholarship. Over the course of his career Don Américo rescued the tejano cultural legacy from oblivion and established the basis for the study of Mexican American cultural expression related to but distinct from its U.S. or Mexican counterparts.¹⁵

Julián Samora’s battle was equally sharp, since it involved challenging an established social science paradigm that characterized Mexican culture and Mexican-origin peoples in deficit terms. Samora not only challenged the conceptualization of nuevo mexicano society as static and traditionalist but in addition made the material culture of nuevo mexicanos a legitimate subject of academic study. Samora and his illustrious students, Jorge Bustamante and Gilbert Cardenas, additionally carried out the first significant studies on those migrants who entered the U.S. without documents both during and subsequent to the Bracero Program.¹⁶

Both Paredes and Samora trained scholars who expanded on their work and took it in new directions, and in so doing laid the intellectual and scholarly foundation that undergirded the nascent field of Chicano Studies and that provided intellectual and scholarly support to the political challenge to U.S. hegemony represented by the Chicano Movement.
The circumstances of the Mexican-origin communities of the U.S., however, are significantly different at the beginning of the twenty-first century as compared to those at the beginning of the twentieth. They are proportionally larger than they were a century ago; the percentage who are native-born is also considerably greater; then regionally concentrated, the population is now diffused throughout the U.S.; its purchasing power is recognized and actively courted; the Mexican-origin electorate is a major force in presidential elections and is able to exercise considerable electoral muscle where it is concentrated; the artistic and cultural production of the Mexican-origin community is increasing more visible and valued; Mexican-origin workers, once principally concentrated in the agricultural labor force, now also constitute a significant proportion of the labor force in the building construction and maintenance, meat processing, food preparation and service, landscaping and gardening, and retail sales sectors; the number of Mexican-origin entrepreneurs, elected and appointed public officials, professionals and white collar workers is large and growing.

Different also is the economic, political and social environment in which the Mexican-origin communities of the U.S. find themselves at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Dramatic advances in rapidity and cost in the technology of communications—or in connectivity—permit virtually instant and continuous contact between and among members of the Mexican communities, wherever they might be situated. The principal barrier to movement is political and not economic. Spanish is for all intents and purposes the second language of the U.S., used in both private and public spaces. The staples of Mexican society and culture are widely and readily available. Spanish-language media, now widely diffused, provides not only up-to-date information on matters relevant to Mexicanos but also cultural reinforcement. Social interaction and intermarriage with Anglo-Americans has increased significantly. Mexicanos today live side by side and intermix with immigrants from throughout the Americas. As was the case a century ago, the most recent immigrants include many with middle- and upper-class origins. These immigrants have the economic and social wherewithal to affirm their cultural modes, to maintain the use of Spanish, as well as to protect their children from the seemingly irresistible cultural currents that flow in U.S. society. The assimilative processes of the twentieth century may not hold to the same degree, with as yet indeterminate but substantive implications for the entire range of U.S. institutions (especially schools and hospitals) as well as for the social dynamics of communities and regions (particularly those located in the U.S. South). These and other phenomena bear close attention and analysis.

What is fascinating at the end of one century and at the cusp of a new one is that some things remain constant. Considered in its totality the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. is still younger and consequently has a higher birthrate than the general population. Its familial size is also larger than that of the general population. As a consequence the individual and family income as well as the financial worth of the Mexican-origin population are significantly lower than that of the general population, as are its levels of educational attainment and achievement. Furthermore the Mexican-origin population still finds itself concentrated residentially, whether by choice or perforce, and thus also segregated in terms of schooling, notwithstanding the growth of the native-born segment of the population, the improvements it has realized in its economic conditions and its victories in the civil rights arena at the end of the twentieth century. Moreover the northward flow of migrants continues unabated and their diffusion is now continental. Their passage north has become even more harrowing than it was a half-century ago, when Samora and Bustamante first documented it. As was the case when Paul Taylor first examined the issue in the 1920s and 1930s, the living and working conditions of Mexican agricultural workers continue to be appalling, notwithstanding the advances in collective bargaining realized by the United Farm Workers Union.

"Once again into the breach..."
even as new conditions and new circumstances present themselves, and thus the scholarly challenges that reigned in the twentieth century continue into the twenty-first. Unfortunately, given the continued vitality of the historical legacy of disparagement, scholars are still having to respond to characterizations of matters having to do with the Mexican-origin population that diminish or degrade it and that disparage its cultural expression. The subtle nature of latter-day manifestations of the historical legacy of denigration should not be interpreted as weakness; rather they should be understood as temporary remissions in a cancer that can rapidly become virulent when the economic or political environment is appropriate. It is a challenge that has faced activists, intellectuals and policymakers since the nineteenth century and continues to do so today. It is the continuing challenge for scholars concerned with the Mexican-origin populations of the U.S.

Complicating the matter further is the internalization and advocacy of that legacy by some erstwhile members of the Mexican-origin community of the U.S. Notwithstanding a century-long effort to connect the *mexicanos de este lado* and the *mexicanos de aquel lado*, there is a continuing gap between the members of the community who identify as Mexican and those who identify as Mexican Americans, between long-time residents and recent arrivals, between citizens and non-citizens. These sentiments have a continuing vitality and create powerful tensions between long-time residents and recent arrivals. While the views of the Mexican-American population vis-à-vis continued immigration have not been systematically recorded or rigorously analyzed, Mexican-American voices are to be found among those that disparage *lo mexicano* and call for Mexicans living in the U.S. to strip themselves of values, cultural ways of being and practices that allegedly impede social acceptance, educational attainment and economic advancement. The resulting tensions have profound policy implications, given the constant political conflicts over immigration, educational and social services, welfare, employment policies and the looming policy battles about national security, the ecology and water, policy struggles in which the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. will increasingly participate, because its interests are at stake.

The matter is further complicated by the views and attitudes held by Mexicans about their Mexican-American brethren. The characterization of Mexican Americans as *pochos* attributed to José Vasconcelos is alive and well among the *mexicanos* who live among us, as the negative reactions of migrant workers to their Mexican-American brethren that Manuel Gamio recorded a century ago. Octavio Paz, wittingly or not, perpetuated an image of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. in *El laberinto de la soledad* that continues to haunt us to this day. Ostensibly intelli-
What is still critically important is a historical and social continuum. Particularly worrisome is the fact that Mexico's leadership has yet to accord Mexican-American policymakers, policy analysts and political figures appropriate attention or recognition, despite the increasingly significant role that Mexican Americans are assuming in Mexico-U.S. relations. Nor are Mexican academics or policy researchers appropriately informed (nor apparently much interested) about the complex and highly charged dynamics of the Mexican-American population.

The growth of the Mexican-origin population of the U.S. and its changed circumstances creates conditions for collaboration on policy and scholarly issues between Chicano and Mexicans that were not present previously. Moreover the dynamics of globalism has created conditions for the Mexican-American population.

1 We didn’t arrive yesterday (and we’re not leaving tomorrow). [Translator’s Note.]


10 Manuel Gamio, The Mexican Immigrant, His Life Story: Autobiographic Documents (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), and Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930). Taylor and Gamio’s studies were complemented by the work of various other U.S. researchers, including Emory Bogardus’s book-length study titled The Mexican in the United States (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1934).


12 See among others Griswold del Castillo and De León, op. cit.


16 See Julian Samora, La Raza: Forgotten Americans (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), and Gilbert Cardenas and Jorge Bustamante, Los Mojados: The Wetback Story