TEXTBOOKS, MEXICAN AMERICANS, AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN HISTORY

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Eighty years ago Bernard Moses, a historian at the University of California, addressed a meeting of the Southern California Teachers' Association on the topic "The Neglected Half of American History." At the time the United States was involved in the Spanish-American War, and the era was one of highly nationalistic feelings. Professor Moses, however, urged his audience to consider the contributions of non-English nations, especially Spain, to the New World. "American history, in its proper sense, embraces all attempts to found and develop civilized society on this continent," said Moses, "whether these attempts were made by the English, the French, the Portuguese, or the Spanish."[1]

Moses, in calling for a study of American history from a continental viewpoint, criticized the parochial view that traced United States history solely from the position of the thirteen colonies. Although he is remembered primarily as a Latin Americanist and comparative historian, Moses was one of the first scholars in the twentieth century to suggest that the history of the United States might follow a multi-ethnic past.[2]

The mainstream of American historical scholarship, until very recently, decided not to follow the course suggested by Moses, although a few people have ventured to approach American history from wider horizons. Probably one of the most famous attempts to awaken awareness towards a broader view was by Professor Herbert Eugene Bolton, who in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1932 stated, "There is need of a broader treatment of American history, to supplement the purely nationalistic presentation to which we are accustomed."[3] Bolton's concept was "Greater America," a view protesting the practice of national historians who ignored the contributions of other cultures. This approach for the most part fell on deaf ears, and Bolton is known mainly for sponsoring the Spanish Borderlands as a field for research, with his theories the target of academic debate and dissection.[4]

Another approach to American history from a continental viewpoint came from Bernard De Voto, who in The Course of Empire traced the efforts of Spain, France, Great Britain, and the fledgling United States to explore and occupy the North American continent, as well as the reaction of the Indians who encountered these invader-explorers. De Voto's study, which culminated in the Lewis and Clark expedition, implied but did not openly state the theme of Manifest Destiny; too much was simply unknown about the continent at the time. De Voto placed in perspective the relationships of the several cultures which recognized the wealth and potential of a region that in extent and mystery lent validity to rumors of Welsh Indians, inland rivers to the Pacific Ocean, and the elusive Straits of Anian.[5]

Until the 1960s authors of secondary and college-level American history survey textbooks generally ignored the comparative possibilities or the view that non-English cultures made important contributions to the development of the United States. Instead, Indians, Spaniards, Mexicans, Dutch, and French were either dismissed as marginal or else considered in an adversary relationship, as enemies defeated or absorbed through Anglo-American expansion. Beyond an obligatory first chapter detailing the European discovery of the New World, textbooks have persisted in proceeding directly into the planting of the thirteen English colonies. This parochial attitude was demonstrated in a review of Charles Gibson's Spain in America which was published as part of the New American Nation series. The book was dismissed as having a "fundamental incompatibility with

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the English experience . . . at every turn," and with the Spanish Borderlands possessing an "almost total irrelevance to the national history of the United States."[6] With this neglect of non-English contributions to the origins of the United States, it should come as no surprise that American history textbooks until the last few years did not pay very much attention to developments involving Black, Hispanic, Asian, Jewish, or other ethnic groups--or, for that matter, women.

Rather than stress neglect, however, it is possible to note a record of progress in recent editions of standard works and the appearance of new surveys by historians seeking a share of the very competitive United States history textbook market. And very competitive it is; at least two dozen such works are currently being advertised for the survey course and its variations, all now claiming an understanding of the contributions and problems of women and minorities in American society. Of course, the effort involved in creating a survey of history spanning over 300 years and taking in political, social, cultural, military, and economic factors is a monumental task, one to be admired for its undertaking rather than denigrated for its results. It should be clearly noted that whatever criticisms are made here are intended as constructive. Questions of what should be included in or omitted from a book constitute a field of battle and frustration between authors and editors. Intentions and results may reflect compromises; and was it so long ago that publishers prepared separate editions for northern and southern schools?

To evaluate all possible minorities throughout American history as they appear in all major survey texts would be a most ambitious task, one not attempted here, though such efforts have been done.[7] Having already noted the insistence of survey textbooks on following a line of westward expansion for the United States' formative period, it seems reasonable to expect coverage of certain minorities once the national boundaries have been delineated. Concentration here is focused on one minority--Mexican Americans--and one era--the twentieth century. In the past decade exploration of Mexican American or Chicano history has been extremely significant and fruitful, as several recent essays have demonstrated in tracing the research done in this field.[8] A 1972 study of a dozen survey textbooks found little coverage of Mexican American participation in American society; but recent monographs and articles, not to mention the demands of Chicanos themselves to have their presence noted, have at last filtered up to the textbook writers.[9]

Mexican Americans, the second largest minority in the nation, have participated actively in many of the most important themes of twentieth century United States history. The tremendous development of Southwestern agriculture was accomplished through the labor of Mexican immigrants who came to the fruit and vegetable and cotton fields of California, Arizona, Texas, and other states; Mexicans worked in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois in factories and established ethnic enclaves far from the stereotypical Southwestern barrios. They endured the deportation and repatriation pressures of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, suffered the condescensions of sociologists who wrote of their alleged cultural deficiencies, and organized themselves socially and politically. Mexican Americans went on strike in the agricultural fields long before Cesar Chavez began his campaigns, published newspapers, and resisted assimilation by their retention of language and culture and through the continuous reinforcement of immigration from Mexico.

Since there are now several studies which specifically survey Mexican American history,[10] the inclusion of Chicanos in the mainstream of twentieth century American history need not necessarily be limited to block paragraphs informing the reader what the Chicano militants have been protesting against lately. Instead, broader questions need to be investigated. What effect did certain issues have on Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States, and vice versa? For example, within the general topic of immigration, textbooks

usually devote space to the restriction controversy of the 1920s. How many include discussion of Western Hemisphere immigration, particularly from Mexico? A vast contemporary literature on this question exists as popular articles and books argued the issue of unrestricted Mexican immigration in the 1920s.[11] Other topics include labor and agriculture in the area of strikes and the bracero programs; the role of Mexico and Mexican Americans in World War II; art and literature; the problem of stereotyping; and the Chicano movement of the 1960s in its political and cultural manifestations.[12]

The response of major textbooks writers to whese issues varies from almost total neglect to an impressive degree of concern. In 1972, of twelve United States history textbooks checked, only two included "Mexican Americans" or "Chicanos" as index entries; almost all now do so. For those books inspected in 1972, the slightest mention of Mexican Americans merited notice.[13] Now, more substantive criteria can be used. Fifteen major textbooks, one of them published in 1973, two in 1974, four in 1975, seven in 1976, and one in 1977, were examined for inclusion of Mexican American contributions to American history.[14] Although the results of this examination were encouraging compared to the 1972 inspection, the ideal of a multicultural heritage for the United States remains at best an equivocal one.

The timeliness of the idea of including minorities in textbooks is perhaps best indicated by noting that of the fifteen books checked, six mentioned Mexican Americans only in the last chapter or in that chapter devoted to the problems of the 1960s. This sudden appearance of a hitherto invisible minority variously estimated at from five to twelve million in size is certainly dramatic, but the reader may wonder where all these people were prior to 1960. Impressions about this ethnic group can be misleading unless one looks beyond the text or perhaps reads between the lines. Chicanos seem to be led by Cesar Chavez (profiled or mentioned in thirteen out of fifteen books), a sort of Super-Mexican version of Martin Luther King, with whom he is usually compared but never contrasted. Chavez boycotts farm products and periodically abstains from food entirely. Chicanos idolize him but do not necessarily follow him; having been passive in political participation until awakened around 1960 by the Kennedy-Nixon campaign, they may also become involved with such militant groups as the Brown Berets or the Alianza which argue for cultural nationalism and even separatism. Chicanos are heavily involved in farm labor work (six books show photographs of Chavez, his union on the march, or farm laborers at work) and, except for Chavez and a very few other individuals--usually militants--are an overexploited, underdeveloped mass--part of an even larger disadvantaged and faceless group. As Allen Weinstein and R. Jackson Wilson summed it up in their textbook, "Women, blacks, Mexican Americans, Indians, homosexuals, college students--one group after another began to complain bitterly about their exploitation by the Establishment and to demand 'liberation.'"[15]

Clearly, such distortions do little to enlighten and much to confuse. The problems of disadvantaged groups may have surfaced in the 1960s, but they hardly originated during that period. The failure of many textbook writers to indicate this suggests again the burden placed on the thirteen colonies-westward expansion orientation of most textbooks. One solution to this burden has been the description of an ethnic group in terms of its being a "problem." Carey McWilliams exposed the fallacy behind this approach almost thirty years ago,[16] but textbooks still stress the disadvantages of being Mexican American. "The history of the Chicanos has not been happy," Peter Jones tells us. "They suffered because they were sometimes dark-skinned and invariably Catholic." Robert Kelley states, "Their jobless rate was high, and managerial positions, save in their own businesses, were generally closed to them. Deeper than these considerations, however, were the cultural distinctions that marked them," including the proximity of Mexico, their language, political apathy, and the prejudice against them. According to the Dushkin

Group, none of whose ten senior advisors and only two of 24 contributors are connected with schools west of the Rockies or much beyond the Mississippi River, "Mexican-Americans . . . often have found employment restricted to low-paying jobs such as harvesting lettuce, yet while such opportunities seemed unattractive to established Americans, they were grasped at eagerly by Mexican-Americans, who either were 'wetbacks' who came illegally or residents who found job discrimination tough to beat." Nothing is said, however, of Mexican American union organization or participation in strikes back to the first years of the twentieth century.[17]

In some cases the very newness of the Chicano presence in history textbooks invites contradiction. Historians have yet to agree on whether Chicano militancy has the support of the Mexican American community generally or of older Mexican Americans. "The emphasis on cultural identity was revealed in [Chicano] demands for their own representatives in state legislatures and other public offices, for recognition of Spanish as an equal language in schools, courts, and elsewhere, and for ethnic studies based on their own heritage," writes G.D. Lillibridge, implying strongly that these are general demands of Mexican Americans. Keith Polakoff and his co-authors, however, see the issue differently: "Despite these efforts, the majority of Mexican Americans remained indifferent or hostile to the new trends," they state. "Only a small percentage, for example, favored the militants' new term of self-identity--Chicano."[18]

Embarrassing errors of fact have found their way into print in a few cases. Rebecca Brooks Gruver finds "Franciscan missions in California in the late sixteenth century" which "by the middle of the seventeenth century" have "claimed 100,000 native American converts." James I. Clark and Robert V. Remini persist in calling Chavez' union the National Farm Workers Association long after it became the United Farm Workers of California, while Polakoff reverses the error and refers to UFWOC in 1962, when the NFWA was organized. Considering the proliferation of Chavez biographies and studies of the farm workers movement, such details should be straightened out.[19]

In general, textbooks have progressed from lip service to limited discussion of substantive issues. Major emphasis, however, is still placed on the appearance of Mexican American militants and their demands of political and social equality in the 1960s. Much more deserves to be included which will put such demands into a more coherent historical perspective. Such topics as immigration from the Western Hemisphere, with a specific focus on immigrants from Mexico, should be included in the section on immigration restriction in the 1920s, found in most texts, that usually considers only immigration from Europe. Motivations for coming to the United States prior to 1929 stress economic factors to the negligence of political and religious problems in Mexico; these areas require more penetrating analysis.[20]

The Great Depression's impact on the Mexican and Mexican American community was highly traumatic. Almost half a million people returned or were sent to Mexico in the 1930s, often at the insistence of several levels of government under the rationale that such removal would somehow "cure" such problems as high welfare costs and lack of jobs for citizens. This occurence, unmentioned in earlier texts, has received increasing attention by recent editions and new surveys. Again, however, coverage in some cases amounts to only a few lines. It should be possible to develop this topic into a more integrated discussion of how people reacted in a time of severe economic setback.[21]

Mexican American participation in World War II is another important area of concern, especially for the irony of Mexican Americans as an ethnic group achieving a higher proportion of Medals of Honor than anyone, while at the same time young Mexican Americans were harassed in the "zoot-suit" riots of 1943 and such injustices as the Sleepy Lagoon case the previous year. The

bracero agreements between the United States and Mexico originated during World War II and lasted until 1964, with enormous consequences for agriculture, economic opportunities, and for the rise of Cesar Chavez immediately following the termination of the program.[22]

Mexican Americans have too long been depicted as politically passive and apathetic. Kelley, in speculating why Mexicans did not become American citizens or why Mexican Americans did not vote, overlooks the existence of White Men's Primary Associations, gerrymandering, and a State Department policy in the late 1920s that winked at illegal entry but prevented naturalization.[23] In fact, major Mexican American organizations have violated the "apathy" stereotype for years. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was organized in 1929, the American GI Forum in 1946, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) in 1960; there are other action groups as well which represent a greater segment of the Mexican American community than does the Brown Berets. The efforts of José Angel Gutierrez's La Raza Unida party and Rodolfo Gonzales' Crusade for Justice deserve more attention, especially as an expression of dissatisfaction with the neglect shown Mexican Americans by Democrats after John F. Kennedy's election in 1960. In the labor movement, Cesar Chavez has been so often proclaimed the leader of the farm workers movement that his predecessors have been overlooked. Enough material now exists in published form to trace the antecedents of Mexican American unionization efforts back to the first years of this century.[24]

The question of illegal aliens, a problem of the 1970s that dwarfs earlier experiences, touches the sensitivities of many Mexican Americans, particularly those who have been harassed by the Border Patrol solely because of physical appearance. It should be viewed in terms of the shifts in United States immigration law from 1917 to 1976. The topic cannot be reasonably covered in a few sentences, yet this is what most authors have attempted to do. The risk of stereotyping and insulting Mexican Americans over the immigration question is possible. Note the difference between Blum's National Experience, third edition, and the latest revision. In 1972 the authors wrote, ". . . for many decades Mexicans had entered the United States--often illegally, as 'wetbacks' (so-called because they swam the Rio Grande to avoid immigration barriers)--to satisfy the need for cheap agricultural labor." By 1976 the fourth edition simplified the same sentence to: ". . . for many decades Mexicans had entered the United States to satisfy the need for cheap agricultural labor."[25] This latest version may not offend people, but neither does it shed much light on a complex problem.

If almost all textbooks treat the Mexican American minority in a mass sense, in terms of its problems and only since the 1960s, there is at least one stunning exception which provides far more than superficial coverage. This is Leonard Pitt's We Americans: A Topical History of the United States. Pitt's book is sui generis. A professor at California State University, Northridge, Pitt arranged his book topically as well as chronologically, and he made minority group participation an integral part of his study. His approach provides generous amounts of information on all minorities, and more on Mexican Americans than possibly all other United States history survey texts put together. Its topical arrangement, however, may require teachers to alter drastically their presentations and approaches to classroom lectures. Judging from the apathy with which students in increasing numbers greet the traditional survey format, this may be a good thing. Another interesting variation on the standard chronological narrative approach comes from the Dushkin Group, which combines narrative, interpretations, source material, and relationship to contemporary issues in a strong depiction of the United States as a multi-ethnic society.[26]

The books surveyed here all have strengths and weaknesses, and of course it is up to the individual teacher to decide which of these or some other--the

presses seem to produce endlessly--will be of greatest use to his survey course. Some texts emphasize recent developments for Chicanos at the expense of earlier experiences; others summarize too much, leaving the impression that the Mexican American minority consists of Cesar Chavez and all the others--much the same as Blacks in America once consisted of Booker T. Washington and all the other Negroes. A healthy sign emerges from these books: in weighing the time lag between an awakening awareness over what has been overlooked and its eventual inclusion in mainstream textual treatment, Mexican Americans are being allocated an increasing share of pages. One need only view the progress made by Black history to see how other minorities may in the future be integrated into the textbooks.

NOTES

[1]Bernard Moses, "The Neglected Half of American History," University Chronicle, I (April, 1898), 121.

[2]James E. Watson, "Bernard Moses: Pioneer in Latin American Scholarship," Hispanic American Historical Review, XLII (May, 1962), 216.

[3]Herbert E. Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," American Historical Review, XXXVIII (April, 1933), 448.

[4]Howard F. Cline, ed., Latin American History: Essays on Its Study and Teaching, 1898-1965 (Austin, 1967), I, 161-227; Lewis Hanke, ed., Do The Americas Have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Theory (New York, 1964); and John Francis Bannon, ed., Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands (Norman, 1964), 3-19.

[5]Bernard De Voto, The Course of Empire (Boston, 1952).

[6]Southwestern Historical Quarterly, LXXII (July, 1967), 146.

[7]Michael B. Kane, Minorities in Textbooks: A Study of Their Treatment in Social Studies Texts (Chicago, 1970), evaluated high school-level textbooks.

[8]Arthur F. Corwin, "Mexican-American History: An Assessment," Pacific Historical Review, XLII (August, 1973); Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "Toward a Perspective on Chicano History," Aztlán, II (Fall, 1971); and Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Luis L. Arroyo, "On the State of Chicano History: Observations on Its Development, Interpretations, and Theory, 1970-1974," Western Historical Quarterly, VII (April, 1976).

[9]Abraham Hoffman, "Where Are the Mexican Americans? A Textbook Omission Overdue for Revision," History Teacher, VI (November, 1972), 143-150.

[10]The standard (and generally considered classic) account is Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People in the United States (Philadelphia, 1949). See also Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera, The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans (New York, 1972), and Rodolfo Acuña, Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle toward Liberation (San Francisco, 1972).

[11]Mark Reisler, "Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant During the 1920s," Pacific Historical Review, XLV (May, 1976), 231-254; and Raymond A. Mohl, "The Saturday Evening Post and the 'Mexican Invasion,'" Journal of Mexican American History, III (1973), 131-138.

[12]Richard B. Craig, The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy (Austin, 1971); Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field: The Story of

Migratory Farm Labor in California (Santa Barbara, 1971); Raul Morin, Among the Valiant: Mexican Americans in World War II and Korea (Alhambra, 1963); John S. Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town (Notre Dame, 1974); and numerous articles in Aztlán and El Grito.

[13]Hoffman, "Where are the Mexican Americans," 149.

[14]The books were Henry F. Bedford and Trevor Colbourn, The Americans: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 2nd edition; John M. Blum et al., The National Experience: A History of the United States (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 4th edition; Merton Borden and Otis L. Graham, Jr., Portrait of a Nation: A History of the United States (Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., 1973); James I. Clark and Robert V. Remini, We the People: A History of the United States (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1975); John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 3rd edition; Ray Ginger, People on the Move: A United States History (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975); Rebecca Brooks Gruver, An American History (Menlo Park: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1976) 2nd edition; Richard Hofstadter et al., The United States (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 4th edition; Peter d'A. Jones, The U.S.A.: A History of People and Society (Homewood: Dorsey Press,1976); Ernest Kohlmetz, ed., The Study of American History (Guilford: Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1974); Robert Kelley, The Shaping of the American Past (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975); G.D. Lillibridge, Images of American Society: A History of the United States (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976); Leonard Pitt, We Americans: A Topical History of the United States (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1976); Keith Ian Polakoff et al., Generations of Americans: A History of the United States (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976); and Allen Weinstein and R. Jackson Wilson, Freedom and Crisis: An American History (New York: Random House, 1974).

[15]Weinstein and Wilson, Freedom and Crisis, II, 808.

[16]McWilliams, North from Mexico, Chapter XI.

[17]Jones, U.S.A., II, 446; Kelley, Shaping of American Past, II, 890-891; and Kohlmetz, ed., Study of American History, II, 546.

[18]Lillibridge, Images of American Society, II, 313-314; and Polakoff et al., Generations of Americans, II, 807.

[19]Gruver, An American History, I, 441; Clark and Remini, We the People, II, 579; and Polakoff et al., Generations of Americans, II, 807.

[20]Robert A. Divine, American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 52-68, describes congressional action on Mexican immigration. See also Mark Reisler, By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940 (Westport, 1976). Areas requiring further investigation include the dramatic increase in Detroit's Mexican population during the Cristero Revolt, 1926-1929, and the entire question of the Mexican Revolution's impact on emigration from Mexico between 1910-1929.

[21]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939 (Tucson, 1974), and Reisler, By the Sweat of Their Brow, Chapter IX.

[22]McWilliams, North from Mexico, Chapters XII-XIV; and Joan London and Henry Anderson, So Shall Ye Reap (New York, 1970), Chapter VII.

[23]Kelley, Shaping of American Past, II, 669; Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States: Dimmit County, Winter Garden District, South Texas (Berkeley, 1930), 398-410, and Divine; American Immigration Policy, 66-68.

[24]Mark Reisler, "Mexican Unionization in California Agriculture, 1927-1936," Labor History, XIV (Fall, 1973), 562-579; Charles Wollenberg, "Huelga, 1928 Style: The Imperial Valley Cantaloupe Workers' Strike," Pacific Historical Review, XXXVIII (February, 1969), 45-68; and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "The First Steps: Chicano Labor Conflict and Organizing, 1900-1920," Aztlán, III (Spring, 1972), 13-49, are examples. On Chicano militancy see Stan Steiner, La Raza: The Mexican Americans (New York, 1970).

[25]Cf. Blum et al., National Experience, 3rd edition, 817, and 4th edition, 837.

[26]Pitt's publisher provides a Study Guide and Instructor's Manual. It should be noted that the Dushkin Group's Study of American History does not mention efforts by Chicanos to organize themselves politically prior to Chavez, and makes no mention of the Chicano movement of the 1960s.