

Nuestra América: Latino History as United States History

Vicki L. Ruiz

As historians, many of us have had the experience of encountering a memoir, diary, or letter in which the individuals mentioned are far more intriguing than the author of the document. The chatty reminiscences of Señora Doña Jesús Moreno de Soza serve as a case in point. Born in California in 1855, she came of age, married, and cared for her family near Tucson, Arizona. When she was eighty-four, she recounted the following incident that had occurred at a local park some fifty years earlier:

They used to have a dancing platform. Once it happened that an Apache squaw called Luisa was dancing when Petrita Santa Cruz . . . came along, and looking at the Apache squaw said, "That is enough, get out, we want to dance." The Apache squaw replied, "I am a person, too."

Moreno de Soza noted that Luisa later married the Apache son of a prominent Euro-American doctor. Given Luisa's rise in status, Moreno de Soza began to greet her as "comadre" (a term of endearment suggesting kinship). But Luisa kept her distance and purportedly responded to the overtures of friendship with the phrase, "Why don't you call me, Mrs. Handy?"¹

This tale from the 1880s reveals subtle registers of negotiation and contestation. In a recent essay Richard Ivan Jacobs and Patrick McDevitt underscore the significance of microlevel narratives. "We as historians have the challenge of accounting for the manner in which individuals acted within the constraints and possibilities of their broader social world to fashion their own sense of place and community through interpersonal relationships."² The remembered interaction between Moreno de Soza and Luisa Handy lends insight into the ways Mexican Americans, American Indians, and Euro-Americans could inhabit the same social spaces and thus complicate U.S. western narratives that privilege a binary relationship between Euro-Americans and a designated "other." This unusual vi-

Vicki L. Ruiz is professor of history and Chicano/Latino studies and chair of the department of history at the University of California, Irvine. This article is a revised version of the presidential address delivered to the convention of the Organization of American Historians in Washington, D.C., on April 22, 2006.

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Readers may contact Ruiz at vruiz@uci.edu.

¹ Señora Doña Jesús Moreno de Soza, "Reminiscences," typescript, 1939, Antonio Soza Papers (Arizona Historical Society Library, Tucson). Although Mexicans railed against being stereotyped as lazy, sneaky, and greasy by eastern newcomers to the Southwest, many would embrace Euro-American epithets for indigenous peoples.

² Richard Ivan Jacobs and Patrick McDevitt, "Introduction: Where the Hell Are the People?," *Journal of Social History*, 39 (Winter 2005), 311.

gnette also shades our understanding of the Spanish borderlands in showing that interactions between Spanish/Mexican settlers and native peoples could occur outside the specter of bonded labor. Yet, despite a florescence of scholarship on the Spanish borderlands over the past fifteen years, U.S. historians frequently give both the region and the era no more than a passing glance.

One reason for that erasure is simply structural. Having finite time and space to devote to the colonial era, teachers and textbooks place an understandable emphasis on the thirteen British colonies as the background to the American Revolution. But such logic should not preclude discussions of other European settlers, notably the Spanish who arrived in St. Augustine in present-day Florida four decades before the founding of Jamestown, Virginia. Another reason harks back to the Black Legend. With roots in the Reformation and in the competition for New World empires, the Black Legend counterpoised virtuous English families against rapacious Spanish *conquistadores*. As the distinguished historian David Weber noted, a particularly lurid version can be located in an early history of the United States. Published in 1777 and written by a Scottish admirer of British colonization, this blatantly partial tract, entitled *A History of America*, proved influential, staying in print well into the nineteenth century. The Black Legend would feed into the currents of Manifest Destiny; however, once the borderlands became territories and states, the diverse histories of pre-United States settlements, if acknowledged at all, became reduced to romanticized images of quaint New Mexican villages or crumbling California missions. Yet disdain and distrust lingered. By 1920 Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest were frequently relegated to either of two categories—the “Spanish” descendants who were living reminders of a bygone era or the larger (and more threatening) group of Mexican immigrants who required guidance and surveillance. In a recent *New York Times* editorial, the best-selling author Tony Horwitz reflected on the way the Black Legend continues to cast its shadow over the Spanish past of the United States. Connecting history to current events, he pointedly observed:

This national amnesia isn't new, but it's glaring and supremely paradoxical at a moment when politicians warn of the threat posed to our culture and identity by an invasion of immigrants from across the Mexican border. If Americans hit the books, they'd find what Al Gore would call an inconvenient truth. The early history of what is now the United States was Spanish, not English, and our denial of this heritage is rooted in age-old stereotypes that still entangle today's immigration debate.³

From carving out a community in St. Augustine in 1565 to reflecting on colonialism and liberty during the 1890s to fighting for civil rights through the courts in the 1940s, Spanish-speaking peoples made history within and beyond national borders. Certainly, one essay cannot comprehensively convey the legacies of individuals of Latin American origin. So instead, in a survey of the state of the field, I emphasize three historical moments pivotal to reimagining an American narrative with Latinos as meaningful actors—1848, 1898, and 1948. Highlighting those years requires setting the appropriate context or working back to them to gauge the significance of these thresholds and the trends that followed.

³ David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque, 1973), 59–60, 68–71; Tony Horwitz, “Immigration and the Curse of the Black Legend,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2006, sec. 4, p. 13. For more information on these polar perspectives, see William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley, 2004).

1848

With the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848 marked the end of the Spanish and Mexican frontier era, an era that remains shrouded in myth and misconception. A snippet from a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* should suffice. "In 1846 it was the scene of a skirmish in the Mexican American War. It later became the site of one of California's first Spanish ranchos." The rancho motif alluded to in this topsy-turvy chronology is perhaps best epitomized by the incarnations of Zorro, whether played by Antonio Banderas or brought to life by Isabel Allende's pen.⁴ The idea of a prestatehood California controlled by fun-loving swashbuckling rancheros was also enshrined in an earlier historiography of moonlight and mantillas where fiestas and fandangos were the order of the day. However, as the historian Douglas Monroy has pointed out, the ranching elite represented only 3 percent of the California population in 1850.⁵

Typically, Californios did not preside over sprawling properties but instead tended small family farms. The legendary nineteenth-century historian Hubert Howe Bancroft described women's labor as follows:

They had charge of the kitchen and of the sewing which was by no means a light task. . . . In ironing the hand was used instead of the flat iron. . . . They also combed and braided everyday the hair of their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Many of them made the bread, candles, and soap consumed by the family, and many took charge of sowing and harvesting the crops.

Spanish-speaking settlers, according to a more recent account, lived in a society where "the entire family awoke at three o'clock and men and women worked until dusk."⁶

What does contemporary scholarship reveal about the peoples who journeyed north to regions that would become the American Southwest, people establishing communities such as Santa Fe (New Mexico) in 1610, San Antonio (Texas) in 1718, and Los Angeles (California) in 1781? They were a heterogeneous lot representing a range of colonial *castas* that demarcated to the nth degree Spanish, African, and indigenous ancestries. Over one-half of the founding families of Los Angeles, for example, were of African heritage. In addition to mixed-race settlers born in Mexico, Jews from the Iberian Peninsula sought refuge from the Inquisition in the far-flung province of New Mexico.⁷ Combing an array of colonial documents, including baptismal records, the historian Omar Santiago Valerio-Jiménez calculated the way economic mobility determined the racial identification of Spanish-speaking villagers in the Rio Grande region of southern Texas and northern Tamaulipas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Using the notion of "pig-

⁴ "Cities Wrangle over Right to Serve Rancho Dominguez," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 26, 2006, p. B1; Isabel Allende, *Zorro: A Novel* (New York, 2005).

⁵ Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley, 1990). For a sampling of this earlier historiography, see Nellie Van de Grit Sánchez, *Spanish Arcadia* (Los Angeles, 1929); and Sandra L. Myres, *Westerling Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800–1915* (Albuquerque, 1982).

⁶ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, vol. 34: *California Pastoral* (San Francisco, 1888), 312; Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin, 1983), 19.

⁷ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528–1990* (New York, 1998), 32–37; Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land*, 17–19, 33–35; David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, 1982), 214–15. On the Sephardic legacy in New Mexico, see Stanley M. Hordes, *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico* (New York, 2005).

mentocracy,” he claimed, “Individual examples abound of poor vecinos . . . ‘whitening’ their caste as their wealth increased. Particularly successful individuals not only entered the upper class but also recreated themselves as españoles.”⁸

Inventing or reinventing oneself—is that not the hallmark of the mythic American frontier? But before we enshrine the early Spanish-speaking settlers in the pantheon of western lore as rugged individuals who trekked the wilderness in search of opportunity, it is critical to recognize that the Spanish borderlands encompassed caste-based communities with bonded labor at the center of social and economic relations. Indentured servitude was prevalent on the colonial frontier and persisted well into the nineteenth century with Indians and, to a lesser extent, people of African heritage pressed into bondage. In San Antonio, Texas, for instance, in 1735, Antonía Lusgardia Erñandes, a “free mulatta,” sued her former master for custody of their son. She recalled her servitude: “I suffered so much from lack of clothing and mistreatment of my humble person.” Moreover, she declared, the patrón, “exercising absolute power, snatched away from me my son—the only man I have and the one whom I hope will eventually support me.” Admitting paternity, the man claimed that his former servant had relinquished the child to his wife. The court, however, remanded custody of the child to Erñandes on the condition that she provide her son with “a proper home.”⁹

Studying the contours of power and stratification by examining the imbrication of gender, caste, race, and culture was the intellectual contribution of Ramón A. Gutiérrez in his acclaimed *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*. He described in intimate detail the lives of captive Indians, often children, pressed into bondage by New Mexican colonists. After serving their time, these *genízaros* (peoples without moorings to either indigenous or Hispano societies) created their own societies, separate physically and socially. With imagination and statistical precision, Gutiérrez, in his richly textured history of colonial New Mexico, elucidates the confluence of power in gendered class relations by focusing on how marital choices interacted with the environment and the economy to create an evolving society predicated on notions of honor, shame, color, and conquest.¹⁰

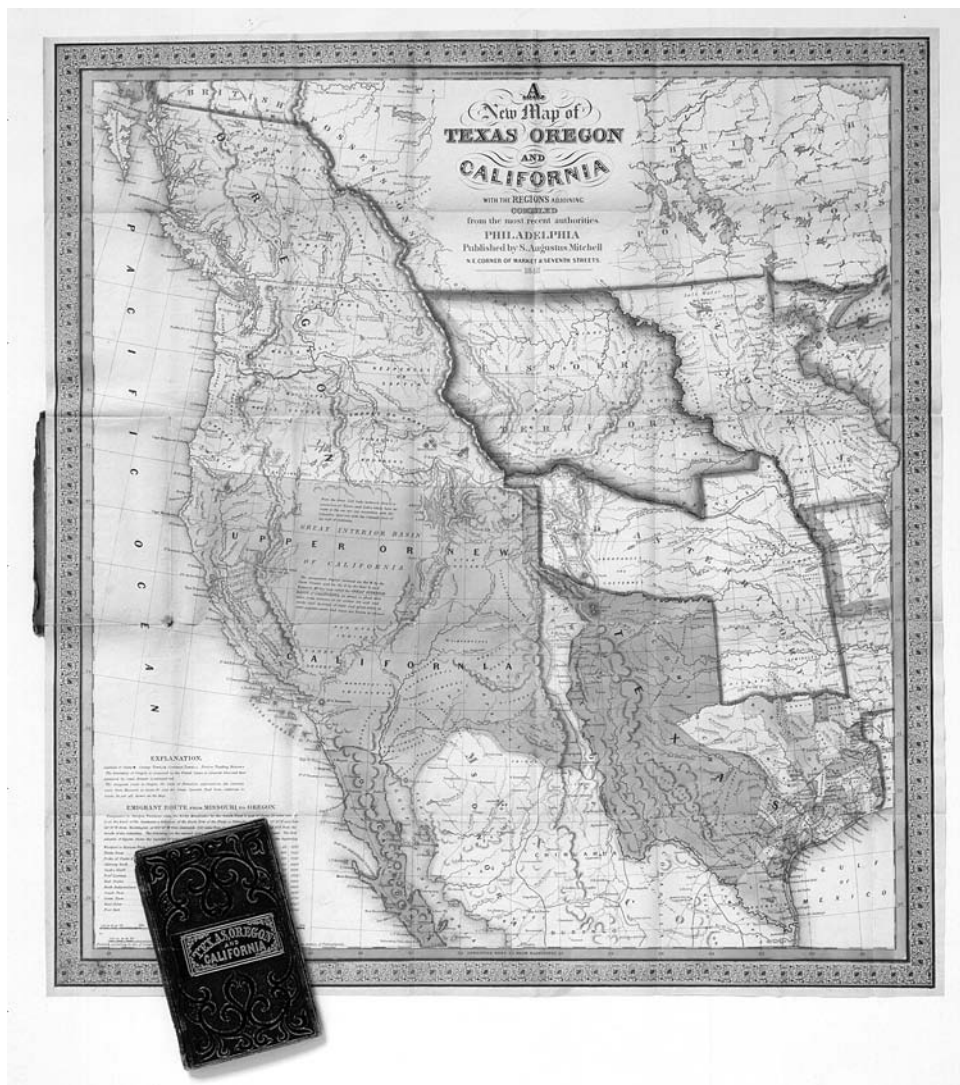
While Gutiérrez forefronted the rigid construction of caste, James F. Brooks in the award-winning *Captives and Cousins* emphasized a greater fluidity of racial locations within intricate “borderland communities of interest” rooted in slavery. Brooks teased out the possibilities for captives to become cousins across Hispano settlements and surrounding native nations, including the Comanche, Apache, and Navajo. But the historian Ned Blackhawk added a cautionary coda. “Forged amid the maelstrom of colonial diseases, warfare, guns, horses, and economic dependency, captivity in the Southwest might have created webs and bridges between peoples, but it did so on the backs of young Indian women and children.”¹¹

⁸ Omar Santiago Valerio-Jiménez, “Indios Bárbaros, Divorcées, and Flocks of Vampires: Identity and Nation on the Rio Grande, 1749–1894” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), 60–74, esp. 71.

⁹ “Child Custody, Mulatto Woman,” typescript, Aug. 9, 1735, Bexar Archives (Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin).

¹⁰ Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, 1991).

¹¹ James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 79; Ned Blackhawk, review of *Captives and Cousins* by James F. Brooks, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 28 (no. 1, 2004), 89–90.



Spanish-speaking settlers experienced a shift in political, economic, and cultural status after the U.S.-Mexican War. The territory affected by that war is depicted in Samuel Augustus Mitchell's "A New Map of Texas, Oregon and California: With Regions Adjoining, 1846." *Courtesy the American West Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, California, 90.253.289.*

Borderlands scholars have provided compelling narratives of societies rife with conflict and accommodation, pain and possibilities, effectively destabilizing popular notions of a peaceful pastoral era. With the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Spanish-speaking settlers confronted dramatic changes in their lives and in their communities. If one considers Texas in the accounting, Mexico lost one-half of its national domain and between 75,000 to 80,000 of its colonist-citizens, the vast majority residing in New Mexico.¹² Yet, the narratives of these people remain hidden

¹² Population estimates were compiled from Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land*, 140; Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 206; and Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York, 2000), 138.

within the American experience, overshadowed by the national implications of conquest, referred to in one text as “the fruits of victory.” Historians generally focus on the U.S.-Mexican War as “the fire bell in the night” with the subsequent acquisition (not conquest) of new lands, a feat that would open up the incendiary issue of slavery in the territories. With the exception of the California gold rush, survey texts turn eastward to Lawrence, Kansas, Boston, Massachusetts, and Charleston, South Carolina, to chronicle the tortuous path to civil war.¹³

But what happened to those Spanish-speaking settlers who remained in the Southwest, ostensibly citizens after a period of one year? Simply put, Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border became second-class citizens, commonly divested of their property, political power, and cultural entitlements. Scholars such as John R. Chávez, Arnolde De León, and Douglas Monroy, grounding their work in an array of archival materials, have crafted narratives of violence and dispossession. Taking a long view and marshaling a wealth of quantitative data, Albert Camarillo’s *Chicanos in a Changing Society* documents labor-market segmentation, intergenerational economic stratification, and barrioization, the colonial legacies of Manifest Destiny. Camarillo argued that the patterns of racial and occupational segregation in nineteenth-century California would frame the lives of Mexicans (both natives and newcomers) well into the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴

Californio elites were fully conscious of their shifting fortunes as they sought to preserve their property and status through familial and business alliances with newly arrived Euro-American entrepreneurs and professionals. The first Spanish/Mexican woman writer in the Southwest, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, would prove an astute chronicler of this general state of declension in her 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don*. In fact, as early as 1859, in a letter to a distant cousin, she lamented, “It cannot be denied that the Californians have reason to complain. The Americans must know it; their boasted liberty and equality of rights seem to stop when it meets a Californian.” She declared, “And now we have to beg for what we had the right to demand.”¹⁵ Working-class people were also cognizant of their new world. The memories of dislocation, violence, and loss inscribed in the minds of Californios and indigenous peoples were artfully excavated by Lisbeth Haas in her award-winning monograph *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936*.¹⁶

Women’s reactions to conquest remain relatively unplumbed. A handful of studies by such senior scholars as Rosaura Sánchez, Antonia I. Castañeda, and Deena J. González revealed intriguing individual strategies by examining women’s narratives and the words of their detractors. For example, Gertrudis Barceló ran a profitable saloon and gaming house in Santa Fe from the 1830s until her death in 1852, and though an object of ridi-

¹³ Mark C. Carnes and John A. Garraty, *American Destiny: Narratives of a Nation*, vol. I: *To 1870*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2006), 350–58, esp. 350.

¹⁴ Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land*, 143, 163–64; John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, 1984); Arnolde De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821–1900* (Austin, 1983); Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers*; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

¹⁵ Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, “María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and the Power of Her Pen,” in *Latina Legacies: Identity, Biography, and Community*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (New York, 2005), 72–83; Madie B. Emarpán, *The Vallejos of California* (San Francisco, 1968), 316–17. Gracias a Howard Shorr for sending me this source.

¹⁶ Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (Berkeley, 1995).

cule among Euro-American observers, she proved a successful entrepreneur whose business became “the hub of the town’s social and economic life.” Barceló offered an exotic respite for settlers and soldiers and exposed Euro-Americans “to Spanish-Mexican music, habits, and humor” as they “unloaded their money at the table.”¹⁷

New scholarly works promise much in examining how Spanish-speaking women reconnoitered their realms. María Raquel Casas’s monograph on intermarriage gives a fascinating exploration of the definitions of race, privilege, and social position, especially through the story of the hispanicized Native American Victoria Reed, who crossed class and color lines more than once in her lifetime. In *Negotiating Conquest* Miroslava Chávez-García records how Mexican women in California availed themselves of the legal system, as they used the courts to hold on to land, to rid themselves of abusive husbands, and to gain monetary support for their children.¹⁸

Concurrently with the economic, political, and cultural upheavals occurring in the Southwest, many Cuban exiles to the east embraced Manifest Destiny. Rodrigo Lazo in his stunning literary history interrogated the publications of Cuban expatriates whose thriving print culture, based in New York and New Orleans from the 1840s through the 1860s, encouraged the United States to set its sights on Cuba. These writers fashioned themselves as emissaries of liberation who believed that Spanish colonialism should be supplanted by American annexation. In *Writing to Cuba*, Lazo teased out the contradictions among Latin American intellectuals who coveted American ideals of freedom while they acknowledged antebellum slavery and U.S. imperial designs. Not a monolithic group of self-styled *filibusteros*, they faced off in internal debates, and some founded an abolitionist newspaper, *El Mulato*.¹⁹

Cirilio Villaverde and Emilia Casanova de Villaverde were exiles whose views would more closely align with those of a younger and more famous compatriot, José Martí. During the Ten Years’ War (1868–1878), Casanova de Villaverde, in a letter to the Italian freedom fighter Giuseppe Garibaldi, asserted “that ‘the beginning of our revolution means the freedom of our slaves, giving them arms, and incorporating them in our patriotic ranks.’” Like the sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Emilia Casanova de Villaverde turned away from the privileges of the family plantation and advocated abolition. Only recently have historians acknowledged her role as an early leader in the quest for Cuban independence, a rebel in her own right, separate from her husband.²⁰

1898

While 1848 burned in the consciousness of Mexican Americans during the decades that followed and of Chicano activists a century later, 1898 symbolized a similar transhistoric

¹⁷ Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis, 1995); Antonia I. Castañeda, “Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 11 (no. 1, 1990), 8–20; Deena J. González, “La Tules of Image and Reality: EuroAmerican Attitudes and Legend Formation on a Spanish-Mexican Frontier,” in *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, ed. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera (Berkeley, 1993), 80, 83.

¹⁸ María Raquel Casas, “Married to a Daughter of the Land”: *Interethnic Marriages in California, 1820–1880* (Reno, forthcoming); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson, 2004).

¹⁹ Rodrigo Lazo, *Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States* (Chapel Hill, 2005).

²⁰ *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Villaverde, Emilia Casanova de”; Lazo, *Writing to Cuba*, 130–35, 170–91.

threshold for Cubans and Puerto Ricans. The Filipino-Cuban-Spanish-American War is often associated with the phrase “a splendid little war” coined by then secretary of state John Hay. That 1898 U.S. intervention had roots both in the jingoistic stories published by the Hearst press and the protection of U.S. business interests in Cuba (valued at \$50 million). But what has remained unacknowledged is the effort of Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States who vigorously championed the cause of Antillean independence from Spain.²¹

With New York City as his primary base, José Martí established the Cuban Revolutionary party (Partido Revolucionario Cubano) in 1892, and within a short span over forty branches appeared in New York, New York, New Orleans, Louisiana, and in Florida at Key West and Ybor City (near Tampa). The party also included a chapter dedicated to the freedom of Puerto Rico. On January 29, 1895, Martí was one of four insurgents to sign a declaration of war—the 1895 Cuban War of Independence had begun. Though he fell in battle early in the campaign, Martí’s deeds, poetry, and essays would assume a life of their own. Revered as an “apostle” of Cuban liberation, Martí left multiple legacies extending into the twenty-first century. In *The Myth of José Martí*, the historian Lillian Guerra critically considered how “by re-memorizing Martí,” Cubans have selectively appropriated his writings to serve as a scaffold for their own divergent political views.²²

Within the last decade many scholars in Latin American and American studies have also looked to José Martí for inspiration, interrogating the meanings inscribed in the 1891 essay “Nuestra América” (Our America) in which he laid out a hemispheric vision of independent nation-states in a concerted dialogue with their powerful “neighbor” to the north.²³ Perhaps portending a century of U.S. intervention in Latin America, Martí warned that

the pressing need of Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent. . . . The scorn of our formidable neighbor who does not know us is Our America’s greatest danger. And since the day of the visit is near, it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and soon. . . . Through ignorance it might even come to lay hands on us. Once it does know us, it will remove its hands out of respect. One must have faith in the best in men and distrust the worst.

For contemporary academics, *Nuestra América* not only locates cognition of imperialism among those who would feel its weight but also points to a new paradigm of “the Americas.” As Sandhya Shulka and Heidi Tinsman explained, such a paradigm “does not emphasize the comparative history of individual countries . . . , but the history of transnational interactions—spaces of dialogue, linkages, conflicts, domination, and resistance—that take place across, or sometimes outside, the confines of national borders and sensibilities.” On the one hand, Martí’s “*Nuestra América*” has become emblem-

²¹ For examples of how U.S. survey texts cover the war, see James Roark et al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, vol. II: *From 1865* (Boston, 1998), 789–95; and Jacqueline Jones et al., *Created Equal: A Social and Political History of the United States* (New York, 2003), 630–35, esp. 632.

²² Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917–1948* (Berkeley, 1994), 13, 167–68; José Martí, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence*, ed. Philip S. Foner, trans. Elinor Randall (1891; New York, 1977), 35–60; Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 4–5.

²³ For further elaboration, see Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raúl Fernández, eds., *José Martí’s “Our America”: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham, 1998); and the special issue “Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings,” ed. Sandhya Shulka and Heidi Tinsman, *Radical History Review*, 89 (Spring 2004).

atic of a truly transnational, hemispheric interdisciplinary discourse, but on the other, Martí as a person should be placed in his own historical moment in the United States. As Nancy Raquel Mirabal has so adroitly and succinctly argued, “Martí represents an intellectual tradition of U.S. based Latin American thought and exile that challenges assumed silences and invisibility.”²⁴

Martí’s contemporaries, both men and women, who had worked tirelessly toward Cuban and Puerto Rican liberation would find their hopes dashed by war’s end. Cuba gained its independence in 1902 with the caveat of the Platt Amendment, a clause in the new nation’s constitution that authorized U.S. intervention. Puerto Rico, however, remained under U.S. dominion as a “non-incorporated territory.” “Are we brothers and our property territory or are we bondsmen of war and our islands a crown colony?”—in 1900 a delegation of Puerto Rican leaders directed that pointed question to the U.S. Congress. Economic dependency on the United States significantly recast the lives of Puerto Ricans and Cubans in the decades ahead. A verse from a poem by the Puerto Rican *independista* Lola Rodríguez de Tió perhaps expressed it best: “Cuba and Puerto Rico/are two wings of one bird.”²⁵

Although the benefits of annexation included innovations in sanitation, transportation, internal improvements, and medical care, the economic restructuring that occurred in Puerto Rico with U.S. capital investment in sugar, large corporate landholdings, and the decline of coffee resulted in the massive dislocation of the island’s rural folk. Ignoring the impact of American business interests, federal policy makers tended to interpret rampant unemployment as rooted in overpopulation. As a result, they promulgated plans to disperse families away from the island through job recruitment or contract labor. For example, in 1900 over five thousand Puertorriqueños arrived in Hawaii to harvest sugar cane, filling a labor shortage caused by the Chinese Exclusion Acts, and for two decades more families would follow.²⁶ In 1917, with the passage of the Jones Act, Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens; yet for many the free exercise of their rights proved elusive. Unlike cigar rollers in Florida, who exerted some control over their labor, Puerto Rican sugar workers in Hawaii found their movements so restricted that they “could not move from one plantation to another without the planters’ consent.”²⁷

By 1920 Puerto Ricans had migrated as contract workers or free agents to forty-five of the forty-eight states, creating communities in such distant locales as Louisiana and Arizona. However, as the historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol revealed, over 60 percent called New York City home. Indeed, the centrality of New York as a Puerto Rican destination

²⁴ Martí, *Our America*, ed. Foner, trans. Randall, 93; Sandhya Shulka and Heidi Tinsman, “Editors’ Introduction,” in “Our Americas,” ed. Shulka and Tinsman, 2, 4; Nancy Raquel Mirabal, “Ser De Aquí: Beyond the Cuban Exile Model,” in *American Dreaming. Global Realities: Re-Thinking U.S. Immigration History*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia and Vicki L. Ruiz (Urbana, 2006), 449.

²⁵ Guerra, *Myth of José Martí*, 118, 224–25, 258–59; Carmen Teresa Whalen, “Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction,” in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Victor Vásquez-Hernández (Philadelphia, 2005), 6–7, 16–21, and esp. 12; Edna Acosta Belén, “Lola Rodríguez de Tió and the Puerto Rican Struggle for Freedom,” in *Latina Legacies*, ed. Ruiz and Sánchez Korrol, 84–94., esp. 89.

²⁶ Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 17–28; Whalen, “Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora,” 6–8; Iris López, “Borinkis and Chop Suey: Puerto Rican Identity in Hawai’i, 1900–2000,” in *Puerto Rican Diaspora*, ed. Whalen and Vásquez-Hernández, 44, 48.

²⁷ Whalen, “Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora,” 13–15; López, “Borinkis and Chop Suey,” 47.

would resonate in the descriptor given to children born on the mainland—Nuyorican—regardless of their specific place of birth.²⁸

Luisa Capetillo, the passionate Puerto Rican labor leader and feminist, certainly found New York a hospitable place during her brief residence from 1919 to 1920. A veteran labor organizer in Puerto Rico and Florida, she used her position as a *lectora* (reader) to cultivate and reinforce the consciousness of cigar rollers on trade union issues, socialism, anarchism, and women's rights. In New York she ran a boardinghouse and adjoining restaurant dishing up revolution and vegetarian fare. In her feminist manifesto, published in 1911, Capetillo stressed a radical version of republican motherhood, emphasizing women's education for their own sake and for the sake of their children. In a manner reminiscent of nineteenth-century prescriptive literature, Capetillo offered homilies in praise of unconventional behavior, including free love and sex education. She also advocated service to the poor and woman suffrage, tenets more in line with mainstream U.S. Progressive Era reform. Envisioning a future of women emancipated in every respect, Capetillo declared, "women are capable of everything and anything."²⁹

The Spanish-speaking cigar workers of Ybor City welcomed both José Martí and Luisa Capetillo. Beginning in 1886, Cuban, Spanish, and Puerto Rican cigar rollers and their Italian counterparts in that city had created thriving, militant work cultures in addition to extensive ethnic community networks. In 1892, when José Martí traveled there to seek support for the Cuban Revolutionary party, Paulina and Ruperto Pedroso, Afro-Cuban community activists, offered their boardinghouse as his headquarters. During the 1895 war, Cubans of all colors contributed their wages, savings, and jewelry for the cause of independence. Such solidarity, however, was fleeting.³⁰

Bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in her engaging, sophisticated study of women's activism in Tampa, Nancy A. Hewitt illuminated the racial and generational cleavages that surfaced within the Latino neighborhoods of Ybor City. She explains how constructions of race influenced ethnic identification among the children of Cuban immigrants. While Spanish-speaking immigrants of varying complexions built ethnic community networks, trade unions, and political associations, their children's sense of themselves became predicated on their own racial location in the Jim Crow South where, not surprisingly, Afro-Cubans developed affiliation and kinship with African Americans.³¹

Afro-Latinos across generations and regions confronted the color line at every turn. In her profile of the beloved journalist and civil rights leader Jesús Colón, Linda C. Delgado offered insight into the complexities of racial location within New York's Puerto Rican communities. "Unlike . . . Arthur Schomburg, Colón saw himself as a Puerto Rican man, who happened to be black, while Schomburg identified as a black man who happened to be Puerto Rican." Moving from the grass roots to the transnational, Nancy Raquel Mira-

²⁸ Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 28; Whalen, "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora," 18–21; Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, "Introduction," in *Latina Legacies*, ed. Ruiz and Sánchez Korrol, 5.

²⁹ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Luisa Capetillo: Feminist of the Working Class," in *Latina Legacies*, ed. Ruiz and Sánchez Korrol, 120–34; Luisa Capetillo, *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out/Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer* (*My opinion on the liberties, rights, and duties of woman, as companion, mother and independent being*), ed. Félix V. Matos-Rodríguez, trans. Alan West Durán (1911; Houston, 2004), esp. 103; *Latinas in the United States*, s.v. "Latinas in the Northeast."

³⁰ *Latinas in the United States*, s.v. "Cigar Workers"; Robert Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882–1936* (Knoxville, 1988), 43, 56–57.

³¹ Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa Florida, 1880s to 1920s* (Urbana, 2001).

bel unpacked the political import of phenotype among Cubans in the following passage: “Early exile and migrant, annexationist, separatist, and independence movements used negotiated meanings attached to ‘blackness,’ ‘whiteness,’ and ‘in-betweenness’ to define and build a nation.” I would add that the imprints of those negotiations can be traced across the entire canvas of Latino history from the borderlands to the present.³²

Patterns of economic dependency, like those unleashed by the Filipino-Cuban-Spanish-American War, could also be located in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. The historian Laura Kathryn Muñoz has discovered an intriguing reference to 1898 made by a normal school teacher in Tempe, Arizona, at the turn of the century, a statement that puts a rosy spin on imperialism. In the words of that Spanish professor, Gracia Fernández:

Spanish is the language of . . . millions of people, the greater part of whom now have active business relations with the United States. These relations are increasing rapidly through the acquisition of the Philippines and Puerto Rico, the steady investment of American capital in Mexico, the constructing of the Panama canal. . . . In truth, the best business opportunities of the day are offered to Spanish-speaking Americans with the necessary technical qualifications to identify themselves with the industrial development of Spanish America.³³

In *Culture of Empire*, Gilbert González complicated the standard “push/pull” interpretation of early twentieth-century Mexican immigration that privileges the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) as providing the crucial push north for over a million people. According to González, large-scale immigration began before 1910 with the uprooting of villagers whose common lands were seized as the regime of Porfirio Díaz attempted to modernize Mexico by opening the country to foreign investment, particularly in agriculture, mining, and transportation. González argued that the emphasis on push/pull bifurcates a more fluid, transnational migration, a migration significantly shaped by U.S. businesses on both sides of the border.³⁴

Even within traditional Hispanic communities in New Mexico, the impact of comparative colonialisms could be found on the land itself. *Translating Property* by María Montoya represented a bold reenvisioning of Hispano land claims, connecting the present to the past in provocative ways. Blending insights from environmental history, social history, and legal studies, Montoya carefully traced the changing notions of land use and property rights as the Maxwell Land Grant in New Mexico passed from Apache homeland to Hispano community to corporate endeavor, beginning with the Dutch manager M. P. Pels in 1885, and, finally, to the Taylor Ranch. Montoya stressed the international dimensions of the land grant’s history, linking Pels, for example, to the removal of indigenous peoples in Java in pursuit of corporate gain and demonstrating how he translated those practices and put them to use against both Hispanic and Euro-American settlers. Instead of Manifest Destiny as territorial conquest that culminated in the U.S.-Mexican War, Manifest Destiny as economic empire building retained (and still possesses) considerable currency.³⁵

³² Linda C. Delgado, “Jesús Colón and the Making of a New York City Community, 1917 to 1974,” in *Puerto Rican Diaspora*, ed. Whalen and Vázquez-Hernández, 68–87, esp. 80; Mirabel, “Ser De Aquí,” 443.

³³ Laura Kathryn Muñoz, “Desert Dreams: Mexican American Education in Arizona, 1870–1930” (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2006).

³⁴ Gilbert González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880–1930* (Austin, 2004).

³⁵ María Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840–1900* (Berkeley, 2002).

1948

Was World War II a catalyst for civil rights among Latinos in the United States? Lorena Oropeza has asserted that their “battlefield exploits” braced Mexican Americans to pursue their rights at home, whereas George J. Sánchez contended that the political education of the U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants, often called the Mexican American generation, had occurred years before many donned a military uniform. Arguing that “the war presented more opportunities than obstacles,” Thomas A. Guglielmo reinforced the point that “patriotic sacrifice and service only further fired Mexicans’ and Mexican Americans’ determination to gain first-class citizenship.” Conversely, David G. Gutiérrez forcefully explained that an emphasis on World War II as a civil rights epiphany obscures the political diversity within Mexican communities before the attack on Pearl Harbor and creates a fiction of unity where none existed.³⁶

In sifting through these divergent perspectives, it is important to examine how the war was remembered by those who came of age during the 1930s and 1940s, especially by individuals who served in the armed forces. In her ambitious oral history project, Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez forefronted the memories of her narrators, memories that equate empowerment with their wartime experiences. Like Oropeza and Guglielmo, Rivas-Rodríguez underscored “a new attitude of entitlement” among returning veterans.³⁷

Approximately five hundred thousand Latinos served in World War II, and that figure does not include the tens of thousands who labored in defense plants and other industries vital to the war effort, such as food processing. Based on my reading of the secondary literature (especially the work of Rivas-Rodríguez and María Eva Flores) and accompanying oral histories, I contend that for the individual in the local community, World War II did signal a significant shift in social relations and daily praxis. Men in uniform challenged seating sections in town theaters, demanded table service at “whites only” restaurants, and desegregated public pools.³⁸ Yet, those protests did not occur in a vacuum but drew strength from two different political traditions forged during the depression, as represented by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Española (the Spanish-Speaking Peoples’ Congress).

Founded by Tejanos in 1929, LULAC within a decade developed into a very influential middle-class Mexican American civil rights organization with local councils scattered across the Southwest. Envisioning themselves as patriotic “white” Americans, LULACers restricted membership to English-speaking U.S. citizens. As the historian David Gutiérrez notes, LULAC, taking a cue from the early National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), stressed the leadership of an “educated elite” who would guide their less fortunate neighbors. He continued, “From 1929 through World War II LULAC organized successful voter registration and poll tax-drives . . . and aggressively attacked

³⁶ Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley, 2005), 13; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York, 1993), 256; Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas,” *Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1216–17; David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, 1995), 117–18.

³⁷ Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, ed. *Mexican Americans and World War II* (Austin, 2005), xviii; Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez et al., *A Legacy Greater than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas of the WWII Generation* (Austin, 2006).

³⁸ Rivas-Rodríguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II*; María Eva Flores, “The Good Life, the Hard Way: The Mexican American Community of Fort Stockton, Texas” (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2000).

discriminatory laws and practices.” One could interpret LULAC’s strategy or performance of whiteness as an organizational orchestration of “passing.” While Afro-Latinos confronted the color line, *güero* (fair-skinned) Latinos could at times situate themselves quite differently. According to Gabriela F. Arredondo, in Chicago Mexicans with light complexions could secure better jobs and mainstream social acceptance by passing: “Many of these Mexicans who could ‘pass’ tried to position themselves as Spanish. In doing so, they worked to gain a European-ness, an identity just a short step away from being *americana/o*.”³⁹

In 1936 Blanca Rosa Rodríguez de León, a Guatemalan immigrant with a young daughter, could have passed given her complexion, education, unaccented English, and elite background. However, this young radical labor organizer chose to forego any potential privileges based on race, class, or color. Deliberately distancing herself from her past, she chose the alias “Moreno” (dark) as a surname, one diametrically opposite her given name “Blanca Rosa” (white rose). For a first name, she selected “Luisa,” perhaps to honor Luisa Capetillo, who had preceded her in organizing cigar rollers in Florida two decades earlier and whose legacy she undoubtedly knew and built on in her daily work. Luisa Moreno would become one of the most prominent women labor leaders in the United States, comparable in stature to Mother Jones, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and, more recently, Dolores Huerta. From the Great Depression to the Cold War, Moreno journeyed across the United States mobilizing seamstresses in Spanish Harlem, cigar rollers in Florida, beet workers in Colorado, and cannery women in California. The first Latina to hold a national union office, she served as vice-president of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), in its heyday the seventh-largest affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Moreno also served as the principal architect of El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Española. She and a small group of Los Angeles activists—Josefina Fierro, Eduardo Quevedo, and Bert Corona—worked tirelessly to make this historic first convention a reality.⁴⁰

On April 28–30, 1939, in Los Angeles the first national civil rights assembly for U.S. Latinos convened—El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Española. Although the majority of the 1,000 to 1,500 delegates hailed from California and the Southwest, women and men traveled from as far away as Montana, Illinois, New York, and Florida to attend the convention. Over three days, they drafted a comprehensive platform. Bridging differences in generation and ethnic background, they called for an end to segregation in public facilities, housing, education, and employment and endorsed the rights of immigrants to live and work in the United States without fear of deportation. While encouraging immigrants to become citizens, delegates did not advocate assimilation but rather emphasized the importance of preserving Latino cultures, calling upon universities to create departments in Latino studies. Despite the promise of the first convention, a national network of local affiliates never

³⁹ Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin, 1993), 17–38; Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven, 1989), 35; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 74–87, esp. 77–78; Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights,” 1212–37; Gabriela F. Arredondo, “Cartographies of Americanisms: Possibilities for Transnational Identities, Chicago, 1916–1939,” in *Geographies of Latinidad: Mapping Latino Studies into the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Matt García, Marie Leger, and Angarad Valdivia (Durham, forthcoming).

⁴⁰ For more information, see Vicki L. Ruiz, “Una Mujer Sin Fronteras: Luisa Moreno and Latina Labor Activism,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 73 (Feb. 2004), 1–20.



Luisa Moreno, a Guatemalan immigrant, shown here in a 1927 photograph, rose in the ranks of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and helped organize the first national Latino civil rights assembly in 1939. *Courtesy Vicki L. Ruiz.*

materialized; only a few fragile southern California chapters limped along during the war years.⁴¹

The stands taken by Moreno, Fierro, and Congreso delegates must be placed in the milieu of the deportations or repatriations of the early 1930s. Between 1931 and 1934, an estimated one-third of the Mexican population in the United States (over five hundred thousand people) were either deported or quasi-voluntarily repatriated to Mexico even though the majority (an estimated 60 percent) were native U.S. citizens. Viewed as foreign usurpers of American jobs and as unworthy burdens on relief rolls, Mexicans were the only immigrants targeted for removal. They were either summarily deported by immigration agencies or persuaded to depart voluntarily by duplicitous social workers who greatly exaggerated the opportunities awaiting them south of the border. Given that recent history, advocating for immigrants was courageous. Speaking before the 1940 conference of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, Luisa Moreno contrasted the exploitation of Mexican workers with their indispensability to western agribusiness, “making a barren land

⁴¹ For differing interpretations of El Congreso, especially on the extent of Communist party influence, see García, *Mexican Americans*, 154–57; and Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 246.

fertile for new crops and greater riches.” She continued, “These people are not aliens. They have contributed their endurance, sacrifices, youth, and labor to the Southwest.”⁴²

While many scholars (myself included) have profiled the possibilities for social change in the postwar era, the chill of the Cold War hastened the demise of ten progressive CIO unions and the deportations of suspected immigrant radicals, Luisa Moreno among them. LULAC and El Congreso would imprint different legacies, the former institutional, the latter ideological. LULAC continued to rely on the courts to redress discrimination, while El Congreso’s platform resonated decades later in the voices of Chicano activists and political stalwarts, such as Bert Corona, who in bridging generations, would build effective coalitions among trade unions, grass-roots networks, and students in pursuit of immigrant rights.⁴³

Two California court cases that foreshadowed the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), *Méndez v. Westminster* (1947) and *Pérez v. Sharp* (1948), reveal the intersections of Mexican American civil rights campaigns with a larger African American freedom movement. In 1945 Gonzalo Méndez, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Mexico, and his wife Felícitas, born in Puerto Rico, joined with four other families to sue four Orange County school districts. They challenged the common practice of drawing school boundaries around Mexican neighborhoods to ensure de facto segregation. Mexicans who lived in “white” residential areas were also subject to school segregation. The renowned California writer Carey McWilliams noted a further precaution taken by school officials, placement by phenotype. “Occasionally the school authorities inspect the children so that the offspring of a Mexican mother whose name may be O’Shaughnessy will not slip into the wrong school.”⁴⁴ During the trial, superintendents reiterated well-worn stereotypes. Referring to Mexicans as a “race,” the Garden Grove superintendent told the court with an air of authority that Mexican children were inferior in “personal hygiene,” “scholastic ability,” and “economic outlook.” The trope of the dirty Mexican appeared prominently throughout the proceedings. The plaintiffs’ attorney, David Marcus, questioned the constitutionality of educational segregation and called in expert witnesses—social scientists who challenged these assumptions about Mexican American children and the supposed need for separate schools. When she took the stand, Felícitas poignantly summed up her family’s struggles: “We always tell our children they are Americans.” Taking almost a year to formulate his decision, Judge Paul McCormick in 1946 “ruled that segregation of Mexican youngsters found no justification in the laws of California and, furthermore, was a clear denial of the

⁴² Luisa Moreno, “Caravans of Sorrow: Noncitizen Americans of the Southwest,” in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigration in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington, 1996), 119–23, esp. 120 and 122. The most comprehensive survey of the Mexican deportations and repatriations during this period is Francisco Balderama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque, 1995).

⁴³ Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque, 1987), 103–23. See Mario T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley, 1994).

⁴⁴ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967); *Westminster School District v. Méndez*, 161 F.2d 744 (1947); *Pérez v. Sharp*, 32 Cal. 2d 711 (1948); José Pitti, Antonia Castañeda, and Carlos Cortes, “A History of Mexican Americans in California,” in *Five Views: An Ethnic History Site Survey for California* (Sacramento, 1980), 238; *Latinas in the United States*, s.v. “Méndez v. Westminster”; Carey McWilliams, “Is Your Name Gonzales?,” *Nation*, March 15, 1947, p. 302. The plaintiffs were Gonzalo Méndez, William Guzmán, Frank Palomino, Thomas Estrada, and Lorenzo Ramírez. On Mexican Americans and school desegregation, see Vicki L. Ruiz, “Tapestries of Resistance: Episodes of School Segregation and Desegregation in the U.S. West,” in *From Grassroots to the Supreme Court: Exploration of Brown v. Board of Education and American Democracy*, ed. Peter Lau (Durham, 2004), 44–67.

'equal-protection' clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." In 1947 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld McCormick's decision.⁴⁵

Méndez v. Westminster assumes national significance through its tangible links to *Brown v. Board of Education* in five interrelated areas. First, NAACP counsel Thurgood Marshall was directly connected to the case as a coauthor of an amicus curiae brief. Second, according to the historian Rubén Flores, the Méndez case influenced a shift in NAACP legal strategy to include "social science arguments." Third, Judge McCormick's decision considered not only legal precedent but also social science and education research. As the historian Charles Wollenberg noted, "much of the social and educational theory expressed by Judge McCormick anticipated Earl Warren's historic opinion in the *Brown* case." Fourth, "it was the first time that a federal court had concluded that the segregation of Mexican Americans in public schools was a violation of state law" and unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment because of the denial of due process and equal protection of the laws. Finally, as the direct result of the Méndez case, the legislature passed the Anderson bill (1947), which repealed all California school codes mandating segregation, and the then governor Earl Warren signed it into law.⁴⁶

The courtship of Andrea Pérez and Sylvester Davis had all the makings of a 1940s Hollywood movie—pretty Rosie the Riveter strikes up a friendship with her dashing co-worker; he leaves to fight for their country; on his return, they fall in love and plan to marry. Credits roll—well, not quite. Pérez was the daughter of Mexican immigrants, and her fiancé Sylvester Davis was African American. Fully aware that California's anti-miscegenation code prohibited their union, they hired the civil rights attorney Dan Marshall, a leader in the liberal Los Angeles Catholic Interracial Council. After a Los Angeles County clerk denied the couple a marriage license, Andrea Pérez filed suit.⁴⁷

In 1948 the California Supreme Court ruled in Pérez's favor, becoming the first state supreme court to strike down an antimiscegenation law. As Dara Orenstein brilliantly showed, the decision hinged in part on *mestizaje*. She argued that the court found the statute "too vague and uncertain" since it did not take into account people of "mixed ancestry" and since government employees could not consistently determine degrees of whiteness. In addition, Judge Roger Traynor, writing for the majority, ruled that the law

⁴⁵ Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855–1975* (Berkeley, 1976), 127–28, 131–32; McWilliams, "Is Your Name Gonzales?," 302–3; "Reporter's Transcript of Proceedings, *Gonzalo Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County, et al.*," pp. 5, 85–88, 116–19, 120, 122–23, 468, 563–65, file folders 4292-M, box 740, Civil Cases 4285–4292, Records of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California (Calif.), Central Division, RG 21 (National Archives and Records Administration Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel, Calif.). For a particularly blunt exchange between David Marcus and James L. Kent over "dirty" Mexican children, see *ibid.*, 116–18.

⁴⁶ Rubén Flores, "Social Science in the Southwestern Courtroom: A New Understanding of the Development of the NAACP's Legal Strategies in the School Desegregation Cases" (B.A. thesis, Princeton University, 1994), 105–16, esp. 116; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, 128, 131–32, esp. 132; Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., "Let Them All Take Heed": *Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910–1981* (Austin, 1987), 119; Pitti et al., "History of Mexican Americans," 239.

⁴⁷ Dara Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California," *Pacific Historical Review*, 74 (Aug. 2005), 367–408; Alex Lubin, "What's Love Got to Do with It? The Politics of Race and Marriage in the California Supreme Court's 1948 *Perez v. Sharp* Decision," *OAH Magazine of History*, 18 (July 2004), 31–34; Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History*, 83 (June 1996), 44–69; *Latinas in the United States*, s.v. "Pérez v. Sharp." Unlike Méndez v. Westminster, where the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had made common cause, both organizations ignored this case, perhaps out of a parallel preoccupation with school desegregation or an unwillingness to tackle such a controversial issue as intermarriage.

violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. At the time of the decision, Earl Warren was still governor of California; nineteen years later, he would preside as chief justice in *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court case that struck down all remaining state antimiscegenation laws.⁴⁸

Pérez v. Sharp unfolded with little fanfare, but it signified a greater fluidity of social relations within southern California, especially among youth. In *A World of Its Own*, Matt García deftly interrogated the lived experiences of Mexican Americans as individuals who traversed and transgressed a sociocultural milieu that included as integral actors Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Mexican immigrants. He explored the confluence of (inherently political) intercultural moments among a range of southern Californians, from aspiring thespians performing at the Padua Hills dinner theater to African American and Latino musicians and their young fans who frequented a popular integrated Pomona dance hall, the aptly named Rainbow Gardens. This appropriation of music and dance occurred across discordant spaces, even within Texas cantinas. Mary Ann Villarreal explored the lives of Mexican American women entertainers and entrepreneurs in the post-war era, especially those who operated local lounges and night clubs. Some challenged gendered conventions in order to turn a profit while their customers reconnoitered those very male-identified spaces for their own leisure.⁴⁹

The year 1948 marked several events of significance to Latino history, including *Pérez v. Sharp*, the founding of the American G.I. Forum, and commonwealth status for Puerto Rico. In contrast to the close of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 and the Filipino-Cuban-Spanish-American War of 1898, the years after World War II did not represent a drastic transformation in Latino history, but one better compared to slow continuous shifts in plate tectonics. This period represented a claiming of public space as Latinos, through protest, politics, and popular culture, attempted to bridge the fault lines of inequality. The three defining moments discussed in this essay—1848, 1898, and 1948—are suggestive of the ways Latino history recasts and complicates constructions of empire and citizenship.

Over the last fifty years, U.S. Latinos have become even more diverse. According to the 2005 census figures, the Latino population has reached 41.3 million and can be categorized as follows: 64 percent Mexican, 10 percent Puerto Rican, 3 percent Cuban, 3 percent Dominican, 3 percent Salvadoran, and the remaining 17 percent divided among a bevy of other Latin American-origin groups. It is crucial to understand their histories within and beyond the borders of the United States and to contextualize present and projected demographic realities by exploring the pasts that preceded them. A recent National Research Council study predicts that by 2030 one-quarter of all Americans will be of Latin American birth or heritage.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Orenstein, "Void for Vagueness," 370–71; Lubin, "What's Love Got to Do with It?," 31–34.

⁴⁹ Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Mary Ann Villarreal, "Cantantes y Cantineras: Mexican American Communities and the Mapping of Public Space" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2003). See also Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo, "Mexican American Home Front: The Politics of Gender, Culture, and Community in World War II Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2004); and Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Identity and Resistance in U.S. Youth Culture during World War II* (Berkeley, forthcoming).

⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "Facts for Features—Press Release: Hispanic Heritage Month 2005," Sept. 8, 2005, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/005338.html; Marta Tienda and Faith Mitchell, eds., *Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future* (Washington, 2006), 3.



Given the theme of the 2006 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, “Our America, Nuestra América,” scholars of Latino history turned out in unprecedented numbers. This “historic” photo was taken right after Vicki L. Ruiz’s presidential address. *Photo by Carlos A. Cruz. Courtesy Carlos A. Cruz.*

With an utopian bent, José Martí dreamed of a “new America,” a transhemispheric union between north and south, rooted in democracy, dialogue, and equality. “There can be no racial animosity,” he wrote, “because there are no races.” He added, “The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies of various shapes and colors.”⁵¹ Racism, nativism, and economic imperialism, which shaped Martí’s world, remain with us in the twenty-first century. Contrary to popular media depictions of Latinos as people who arrived the day before yesterday, there exists a rich layering of nationalities, generations, and experiences. I seek a fuller recounting of this history, encompassing both transhemispheric and community perspectives. *Nuestra América es historia americana. Our America is American history.*

⁵¹ Martí, *Our America*, ed. Foner, trans. Randall, 93–94.