

Explorations in Sights and Sounds

European immigration—leads to attacks on groups least able to defend themselves. Thus, the “.....breakdown of racially and ethnically ordered systems unleash forces of competitive exclusion against the least powerful targets in the system” (224). Olzak suggests this situation occurred with African Americans as European groups achieved social mobility.

The potential audience for this work lies at the graduate level. The early chapters supply a detailed review of the literature, propositions, and arguments. The methodology utilized in the study and the subject matter discussed make the book appropriate reading in most advanced sociology courses. The study uses data collected at three levels: countrywide immigration and economic indicators, occupational segregation in seventy-seven cities, and the growth of ethnic/racial group organizations.

Notwithstanding these strengths, there are weaknesses. The book is at times extreme in stating over and over again its propositions and arguments. This gives the reader an impression that the book is a collection of conference papers bound together with weak transitions. This view is reinforced by a change in pronouns (“I” to “we” back to “I”) as the chapters progress. In any revision, the author may choose to correct this problem through eliminating any reference to self.

While the author goes to great lengths defining most concepts, indeed, a strength of the work in general, she shows little consistency in her application of the term “state,” a political entity, i.e., a country.

Overall, the work is valuable. The theoretical framework it contributes offers the student of ethnic rivalries an understanding of intergroup tensions in the United States at the turn of the century and might be used to explore conflicts among nationalities in the former states of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

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Genaro M. Padilla. *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) xiv, 280 pp.

Genaro Padilla and University of Wisconsin Press should be commended for the publication of a much needed addition to the study of American autobiography, in general, and ethnic autobiography, in particular. Early Mexican American autobiographies remain largely ignored and forgotten. The importance of these autobiogra-

phies should not be ignored, however, especially with regard to the study of the West and Southwest. With this book, Padilla opens the door to the retrieval and study of these important historical documents.

Padilla's study begins with the development of Mexican American autobiography as a result of the annexation of northern Mexico by the United States through military force in 1848. He refers to nineteenth-century Mexican American autobiographies as "autobiographical narratives of dispossession." As with other ethnic autobiographies, on the surface these narratives may seem to express a nostalgia for an earlier world, but in actuality, they provide voices of opposition to the enforced changes in their lives. These colonized people began the Mexican American cultural tradition in the United States, and the formation of this culture can be traced through these autobiographies.

Padilla argues that current Mexican American autobiographical study considers the narrative production to be a recent phenomenon, but he demonstrates that autobiographical expression in Mexican American culture has an historical base. He claims that, in contrast to slave narratives which were exploited by Anglo Americans in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, Mexican American narratives "were meant to function only as supplemental material for American historians and were, therefore...quite intentionally not published. Hence, scores, perhaps hundreds, of Mexican American personal narratives remain in small state and regional historical society libraries and university special collections..." Padilla argues for the recovery of this rich source of literature in order to understand the origins and complexities of the Mexican American culture.

Starting from a theoretical standpoint based on the development of the study of Native American autobiography, Padilla develops his theory of Mexican American autobiography. Like the Native Americans, the Mexican American narratives which resulted after the 1848 conquest voice the experiences of dislocation, loss of homelands, and loss of traditional religious and cultural practices. The narratives express how these new Americans reconciled themselves to enforced lifestyle changes while establishing their resistance to these changes.

The problem with this book is that, having discovered a treasure-trove of long ignored material (memoirs, diaries, family histories, poetry, correspondence, and texts of corridos), Padilla tries to tackle too much material in too little space. It is as if he feels he must analyze each narrative immediately for fear that it will be forgotten again. No one narrative is given the in-depth analysis it deserves. Instead, the narratives become a jumble of representations to do with the topic of the particular chapter at hand. While his first

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two chapters are strong indictments for the study of Mexican American autobiography and a grounding of that study, the remaining four chapters attempt to group this vast amount of material into some sort of thematic structure. The amount of material, however, is just too overwhelming.

In spite of this, Padilla has given us an introduction to the world of Mexican American autobiography which begs to be studied. With each peek at the lives of these men and women who experienced the obliteration of their culture, the reader wants to learn more. With this book, Padilla encourages more students of Mexican American autobiography with the realization that there are many “truths” which have yet to be learned from these narratives.

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Américo Paredes. *The Hammon and the Beans and Other Stories*. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994) 230 pp., \$9.95.

Américo Paredes is a seminal figure in Mexican-American studies. Professor Emeritus of English and Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, he is best known for his work in folklore, principally *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. But after a distinguished career as teacher and scholar, he has turned in recent years to literature (mostly written years ago), with the publication of a novel (*George Washington Gómez*) in 1990 and a collection of poetry (*Between Two Worlds*) in 1991. The present accumulation of seventeen stories, combined with Paredes' novel and poetry, provide a clear and comprehensive literary view of Mexican-American life in Texas and elsewhere during the first half of the twentieth century. An excellent introduction by Ramón Saldívar presents a much-needed history of south Texas and the recurrent “border troubles” so that the reader can better comprehend the socio-cultural milieu which gave birth to the stories. In Saldívar's words, Paredes' collection represents brilliantly “the difficult dialectic between a Mexican past and an American future for the Texas Mexicans living on the border at the margin of modernity and modernization” (xvi). Saldívar also includes information about the author and the histories of many of the selections—where they were written, dates of composition, circumstances, etc. Most appear in print for the first time in a colorful and attractive volume with cover design by Mark Piñón.

The title story and several others focus on the racial tensions in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The young first-person narrator of