

**ETHNIC REALITIES
OF MEXICAN AMERICANS**

ETHNIC REALITIES OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

From Colonialism to 21st Century Globalization

By

MARTIN GUEVARA URBINA, PH.D.

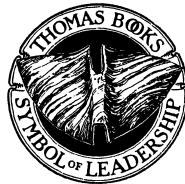
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Sofia, for all the beautiful things that you represent, I dedicate this book to you, for your sublime personality has been enlightening and inspirational! I also like to express my most profound appreciation for every smile, for every laugh, and for every moment we've shared, as when it comes to *lo mas bonito de la vida, los grandes momentos*, it's all about powerful emotions and vivid memories, which stay with us forever. I will eternally be grateful for your loyalty, compassion, care, and love. Truly, thank you for giving meaning to my existence and for adding color to my life—for you are glory of life, glory eternity!

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I dedicate this book to my parents, Trinidad and Amelia Vela, who made it possible for me to attain my dreams and goals. Equally important I thank my lovely wife, María, for her encouragement and support. Her encouragement made it possible for me to continue my research and writing. And finally to my children, Joel and Cristina, for their patience and understanding and support.

J.E.V.

Dedicated to my father, Abundio Sánchez, 1918–1980.

J.O.S.

FOREWORD

Until lions have their own historians, histories of the hunt will glorify the hunter.

—African proverb

Predating the Constitution, the United States has characterized itself as a democratic country deeply grounded in essential elements like civility, stability, freedom, equality, tolerance, and justice; always progressing while avoiding ruptures and discontinuities. In truth, contrary to conventional wisdom, the *American experience* is more reflective of continued political, economic, and social chaos in the historical, aggressive, and violent fight for conquest, expansion, wealth, power, control, and global dominance than a unified movement for universal freedom, positive social change, equality, and justice. In effect, while historically there has been gross inequality and injustice in possibly all American institutions, especially in major U.S. institutions, some of the most fundamental historical ruptures, discontinuities, inefficiencies, inequalities, and injustices have been generated by the very same institutions like the educational system, the criminal justice system, and the political system—in the name of progress, national security, or global power and solidarity. Worse, in the very arena where the machinery of justice is vigorously operating, and thus tranquility, efficiency, equality, and justice are supposed to prevail, some of the most savage and catastrophic situations, events, and movements have been taking place since the creation of the criminal justice system to the twenty-first century globalization movement (Bosworth and Flavin, 2007; Walker, 1998) while strategically *targeting* certain segments of society, particularly Mexican Americans, African Americans, and poor whites (Urbina, 2012a).

As in the past, today in the midst of the twenty-first century globalization movement including the globalization of knowledge, people tend to blindly accept social and criminal justice policies, without truly questioning the very essence of social policies or American criminal laws. Most notably, in the

area of ethnicity/race and American law, as early as 1740 the South Carolina Slave Code, for example, identified:

the people commonly called negroes, Indians, mulattos and mestizos have [been] deemed absolute slaves, and the subjects of property in the hands of particular persons the extent of whose power over slaves ought to be settled and limited by positive laws so that the slaves may be kept in due subjection and obedience (cited in Hall, Wiecek, and Finkelman, 1996:37),

resulting in an historical legacy of manipulation, intimidation, conflict, brutality, violence, marginalization, oppression, and silencing of Mexican Americans, African Americans, other minorities, and whites who dare to seek social change for equality and justice.

Historically, starting with the Declaration of Independence (1776), ethnicity and race have played a central and *formal* role in defining and redefining U.S. social policies and laws and how social policies and criminal justice policies are applied to Mexican Americans, African Americans, and other minorities. However, traditionally Mexican Americans and other Latinas and Latinos have been neglected and excluded from the *pages of history*. While Mexican Americans and other Latinas/os like African Americans have in fact historically suffered the indignities of conquest, colonialism, and *de jure* segregation, the Mexican American experience has normally been neglected, excluded, or skewed in academic research, publication, and public discourse. Consider, for instance, under the “divine” rationale of Anglo-Saxon expansion and Manifest Destiny premised on the ideology of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural superiority of white Americans, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War in 1848, granting the United States 55 percent of Mexico’s territory, an area that now comprises about one-third of the continental U.S.

Invariably, while American historians and other authors are quick to reference with vivid detail the supposed glorious conquering of the southwest, they tend to exclude or reduce the ethnic realities of Mexican Americans to a diluted notation or a footnote, sometimes releasing outright lies. In reality, the treaty did not stop the bitterness or the brutal and vicious violence between these two communities; instead it *gave birth to a legacy of hate* where ethnicity/race was a driving force (Acuña, 2011a), extending into 2013. The conquest, in truth, set a pattern for ethnic and racial antagonism, viciousness, violence, and oppression justified by the now popular slogans like “Remember the Alamo!” and myths about the Mejjicanos’ or Chicanos’ treachery—slogans which are then legitimized and propagated by high ranking government officials and intellectual racists. In effect, “to this day, the Alamo has been a shrine to anti-Mexican sentiment, the ultimate symbol of the supposed glori-

ous victory of the superior moral character of ‘white’ over ‘brown’” (Urbina, 2012b:34). Ideologically, as with Native Americans centuries before and later with African Americans, the government fabricated a justification to institutionalize prejudice, racism, discrimination, oppression, and vicious brutality toward people of Mexican heritage. More globally, the Anglo conquest was also a well calibrated capitalist conquest (Gómez, 2007); ultimately absolute dominance.

Soon after the Mexican conquest, for instance, the 1855 “Greaser Act,” an anti-vagrancy law enacted in California defining vagrants as “all persons who are commonly known as ‘Greasers’ or the issue [children] of Spanish and Indian blood” was a deliberate use of criminal law to specifically target Mexicans based on ethnicity and race (Morín, 2009:16). Clearly, as documented by José Luis Morín (2009:15), “This history is instructive as to how Latinas/os would be regarded in later years, since persons of mixed racial backgrounds, as many Latinas/os are, have been and often continue to be viewed with disdain, and subject to discrimination by the dominant ‘White’ social structure.”

In the area of law and order, which interacts with just about every facet of everyday life, towards the end of the twentieth century Jonathan Simon (1997:173) proposed that advanced industrial societies were actually “governed through crime” with the overdeveloped societies of the West and North Atlantic “experiencing not a crisis of crime and punishment but a crises of governance that has led [them] to prioritize crime and punishment as the preferred contexts of governance,” redefining not only the limits of criminal laws but also the parameters of social policies and programs while socially reconstructing the confines of ethnicity and race. Then, at the turn of the century, Tony Fitzpatrick (2001:220) declared that as “global capital becomes apparently unmanageable” and “as the polity and the economy detached after a century of alignment” the state must give itself, particularly its agents, something to do, and so the state “socially and discursively constructs threats that only it can address through . . . punitive responses to the chaos it has [helped facilitate],” as in the case of the *war on drugs*, the *war on immigrants* with provoking phrases like “illegal aliens,” the *war on terrorism*, and various other aggressive social control movements. With crime and legal systems becoming increasingly transnational, assisted by advanced technological innovations and a highly charged American media, “at once totalizing and individualizing,” such strategies congeal in appealing political formations that can govern “all and each” with stealthy precision (Bosworth and Flavin, 2007; Gordon, 1991:3; Short and Magana, 2002; Welch, 2006; Yosso, 2002) giving the state a notion of absolute control, legitimacy, and justice, and to a feared and malinformed society an appearance of global solidarity, power, and dominance.

In essence, from the early brutal conquest of Native Americans to the savage slavery of African Americans, to the violent conquest of Mexicans, to the oppressive conquest and colonization of Puerto Ricans, to the most recent social control movement (the war on terrorism) with its corresponding elements like ethnic/racial profiling, public space housing sweeps, police surveillance cameras, and drug/prostitution-free zones; such strategized movements clearly reveal that the U.S. obsession with law and order is just as much about ethnicity and race as it is about safety, equality, justice, or human dignity. For instance, as reported by Law Professor David Cole (2001:248) “racial profiling studies . . . make clear that the war on drugs has largely been a war on minorities. It is, after all, drug enforcement that motivates most racial profiling.” Subsequently, while the overall rate of the inmate population in state and federal prisons increased dramatically from 1971 to 2001, Latinas and Latinos experienced a tenfold increase (Bonczar, 2003). In fact, by 2004 the rate of Latina/o incarceration in state and federal prisons was 2.6 times greater than for whites (1,220 per 100,000 compared to 463 per 100,000) according to Paige Harrison and Allen Beck (2005) of the Bureau of Justice Statistics with the Sentencing Project (2003:1) reporting that “Hispanics are the fastest growing group being imprisoned.” Quickly, the ramifications of ethnic identity formation, categorization, and the new dimensions for *redefining* crime and punishment became gravely pressing in imprisonment rates, as reported by University of California, Berkeley Professor Loïc Wacquant (2001:82), “turning over from 70 percent white at the mid-century point to nearly 70 percent black and Latino today, although the ethnic patterns of criminal activity have not been fundamentally altered during that period.”

In all, as in no other time in U.S. history is the historically dominant majority experiencing a more profound “cultural crisis” in that after centuries of *total control* in all facets of social life, *dictating* life, death, and even where a person should be buried, their ideas about ethnicity, race, gender, and social life are under attack by the intertwining forces of diversity and multiculturalism as well as political and economic uncertainty as documented by Martin Guevara Urbina in *Beyond Post-Racial America: 21st Century Dynamics of Multiculturalism* (2014). In effect, in part:

because the United States considers itself a ‘moral’ and ‘law-and-order’ society, the US has a phobia of the *outsider*, the *different*, and the *stranger*. As an institutionalized state of feeling and thinking, such phobia has manifested itself into ignorance, which in turn has resulted in viciousness and vindictiveness . . . [and] fear of those who threaten our interests or the status quo has manifested itself into low levels of tolerance. (Nielsing and Urbina, 2008:233)

subsequently *mobilizing* the agents of American institutions, particularly the political system, the educational system, and the legal system while making the criminal justice system the prime apparatus for intimidation, suppression, control, and silencing of those who threaten the historically dominant white social structure.

Yet, while the *white experience* and to a lesser extent the *African American experience* have been well documented, the *Mexican American experience* has been neglected, minimized, or excluded from the pages of history. More significantly, while certain social issues have received wide publicity including the disproportionate representation of Mexican Americans, African Americans, and other minorities in the criminal justice system, much less analyzed are the historical and contemporary mechanisms, beliefs, and ideologies that govern the Mexican American experience vis-à-vis U.S. institutions. In the new millennium with the globalization movement in full-swing, it is of utmost importance that the ways in which ideas of ethnicity, race, gender, and class uphold the “legitimacy” and *ideology* of the historically dominant majority be demystified and exposed in the pages of academic literature; a central objective of this book.

In this mission, moving beyond the *when* and *how*, rather than developing a single explanation for the *why* of the Mexican American experience this book presents a variety of studies that illustrate alternative ways of analyzing the ethnic realities of Mexican Americans over the years. It builds a framework of methodological, theoretical, and philosophical analysis within diverse fields of investigation to better understand the various *driving forces* shaping and reshaping the dynamics of the Chicana/o, the Latina/o, and the overall American experience. To accomplish this objective, authors draw on literature from various fields of study including history, sociology, political science, criminology, criminal justice, critical race/ethnic studies, post-colonial perspectives, and globalization literature.

Exploring the ethnic realities of Mexican Americans from colonialism to the twenty-first century globalization movement, the findings reveal that ethnicity, race, gender, class, and several other variables continue to play a significant role in everyday life. With vivid detail, the authors report sound evidence that testifies to a historical legacy of manipulation, intimidation, conflict, violence, brutality, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, oppression, power, control, and dominance, and to white America’s continued fear about Mexican Americans and other ethnic/racial minorities; a movement extending into the twenty-first century. Lastly, at the end the authors vent into the *future* of the historically constant Mexican American dilemma—*borders and dreams*.

Martin Guevara Urbina, Ph.D.

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M.G.U.

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for their support in the completion of this book. Their support and encouragement made this work possible.

J.E.V.

Over the years I have persisted in my research on the Klan slowly obtaining the information that I knew had to exist, despite advice to the contrary. My interest in the Klan began in the early 1990s when working on my master's degree. During my research on the 1970 Uvalde school walkout by Hispanic students, I came across information on Uvalde's Kan No. 279. I wondered how the organization had affected the community over the years, and how it may have influenced and impacted the mindset of whites in the community. What became clear was that the organization had left a deeply conservative and racist influence. I was also able to obtain bits and pieces of information regarding activity by Uvalde's Klan against the community's Hispanics.

This led me to further research during the time I attended the University of Houston from 1993 to 1996. It was there, as a research assistant that I was able to begin the process of collecting the information I knew existed. The preliminary work on the Klan contained in this book is over twenty years in the making. During all that time it has been my family which has suffered the most due to my dogged determination. It is the everlasting patience of my wife Angelita, son Michael, daughters Sophia and Stacie, and now my grandchildren, Eric, James and Saarah that I must acknowledge. The work I have accomplished to date is a tribute, not to me, but to them.

J.O.S.

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**ETHNIC REALITIES
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Chapter 1

ETHNIC CONSTRUCTIONS: THE MAKING OF THE UPCOMING MAJORITY, MEXICAN AMERICANS

*Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin—
even more than death . . . Thought is subversive and revolutionary,
destructive and terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established
institutions, and comfortable habit. Thought looks into the pit of hell
and is not afraid. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the
world, and the chief glory of [people].*

—Bertrand Russell

Around the globe for thousands of years, human mobility has been a landmark of social existence and transformation with people voluntarily leaving, forced to leave, or taken out of their area of origin to different geographical areas, normally with specific objectives like the relocation of criminals from one country to another, the transportation of slaves to different countries, and the importation or exportation of immigrations around the world. In modern times though, no country in the world has possibly experienced more human mobility, migration, and social transformation than the United States. Yet, while human mobility, expansion, migration, and societal transformation have been historical inner elements of the American experience since the days of the conquistadors and subsequent conquest, colonialism, slavery, and imperialism, the focus of academic investigations and publications has been on Caucasians (whites) and African Americans (blacks) with much less academic dialogue of other ethnic minorities, even though Latinas and Latinos now constitute the second largest ethnic/racial group in the United States. In fact, historically ethnic minorities have either been excluded from the *pages of history*, or all Latinos of various national origins

have been treated as a monolithic group. Consequently, over the years there has been gravely scant discourse on Mexican Americans who have historically constituted a high majority of Latinos in the U.S. with a similar pattern of neglect experienced by other ethnic minorities. Similarly, as in everyday life, in the context of social control the Mexican American and the overall Latino experience has been even less studied, documented, or discussed in academic settings to include research, publication, and dialogue.

Therefore, without exploring the ethnic experience of Mexican Americans in its totality, from colonialism to twenty-first century globalization, the truths and realities of Mexican Americans and other ethnic minorities remain in the shadows of the past, keeping the ethnic realities of Mexican people hidden from the pages of history, and for people of Mexican heritage currently living in the U.S. to remain in a state of manipulation, intimidation, oppression, marginalization, and *silence*. This chapter shows that significant research gaps remain to be bridged if we are in fact going to be more inclusive in academic investigations thus generating and disseminating more representative, sound, and objective information, projecting the historical realities of the *entire* American experience to include not only whites and blacks, but also Mexicans and other ethnic/racial minorities. For instance, historians, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, criminologists, and other social scientists tend to focus on certain issues, events, or situations while documenting the Mexican American experience without historically delineating the ethnic experience over time and either minimizing or excluding historical movements that have governed the Mexican American experience for centuries—providing a story of the Mexican American experience without *unearthing* the historical roots, which originally set in motion the forces that would ultimately shape and reshape the everyday experience for Mexican Americans and other Latinos. One of the most detrimental social movements against Mexican Americans and other Latinos for over one and a half centuries has been the criminalization of Mexican identity. However, while scholars have been documenting the overrepresentation of minorities, especially African Americans, and more recently Latinos, throughout the American criminal justice system they have failed to analyze not only the Mexican American experience, but the overall ethnic experience by the totality of intertwining historical factors, events, issues, circumstances, and most critically, ideologies that in fact structure the institutional foundations.

This kind of historical, theoretical, and methodological approach is not, on its own, sufficient to fully capture the ethnic realities of Mexican Americans over the years in everyday life or in their encounters with the criminal justice system. In essence, the ethnic experience begins to unfold when Mexicans were first *joined* by whites in then Mexican territory, and soon after Mexican Americans became foreigners in their own land, which subse-

quently began a migration cycle that continued for decades and exacerbated a legacy of struggle, brutality, and hate that remains highly charged in the new millennium. In modern times, the ethnic experience begins when Mexicans first enter the U.S. and even before they arrive in *the land of the free*, the United States tends to influence people beyond its national borders, especially now with the advent of a modernized form of globalization, a kind of migration in itself. Therefore, researchers, critics, and commentators need to place contemporary ideas, practices, and experiences in the context of the past with broader ideas about ethnicity, race, and historical ideologies that continue to shape and reshape the ethnic realities of Mexican Americans in the twenty-first century. The authors demonstrate a different approach to the contemporary study of Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the United States by providing an historical examination of prior race and ethnic investigations, explaining the format of this book, and the introduction of subsequent chapters.

MEXICAN AMERICANS: THE UPCOMING MAJORITY IN AMERICA

Contrary to conventional wisdom that Mexican Americans and other ethnic minorities are *new* to America, Latinos were some of the first immigrants in the United States and Mexican Americans and other Latinos have been in the U.S. for centuries. Before the English came to America in 1609, there was a Latino presence in the southwest, including Texas, and they have been in the present-day U.S. since 1565 in Florida and 1598 in New Mexico, centuries before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War in 1848, in which Mexico lost over half (55%) of its territory to the United States subsequently further fueling the notion of conquest, expansion, privilege, power, control, and, ultimately reformulating white supremacy and dominance over ethnic and racial minorities.

Normally excluded from popular discourse, Latino culture has been part of “America” longer than the United States has existed. Therefore, understanding the Mexican American experience and the Latina/o heritage is essential for understanding the roots of America’s ethnic minorities and their everyday stories, whether it is the cowboy icon, mustangs, barbecue, dollar sign, law, or Texas chili which is as old as the U.S. Constitution. Contrary to arguments that Mexican and other Latinos are *infiltrating* the supposed Anglo heritage, Spanish culture and language became part of the national fabric when the United States expanded west of the Mississippi and south of the Carolinas. In fact, the oldest records of European explorers and settlers

on U.S. territory were actually written in Spanish. The oldest European town, St. Augustine, Florida was founded by Spain in 1565, 42 years before the founding of Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia. U.S. law has also been influenced by the Spanish legal tradition, as symbolized by the carving of Castilian monarch Alfonso X, King of Castile, in the United States House of Representatives. The U.S. dollar, a powerful symbol of Americanism also has Spanish roots. In fact, illustrating the historical ethnic influence from 1500 until the mid-nineteenth century, the Spanish dollar, commonly known as “pieces of eight,” was the de facto currency of international commerce, and it was legal tender in the U.S. before Congress approved the Coinage Act of 1857—thus serving as a model for national currencies ranging from the U.S. dollar to the Chinese yuan. Even the dollar sign (\$) is widely believed to have derived from symbols connected to the Spanish currency circulating in the American colonies, and stock prices were quoted on the New York Stock Exchange in *eighths* until 1997 (Nadeau and Barlow, 2012).

However, despite historical mechanisms for population control, and the long legacy of prejudice, manipulation, intimidation, oppression, and hate against Mexican Americans and the entire Latina/o community, the Mexican American and overall Latina/o population continues to grow, leading to significant demographic changes across the country with corresponding utility, implications, and ramifications in the twenty-first century. By 2010, Latinas and Latinos, the largest minority group and the second largest racial/ethnic group (second only to Caucasians), constituted approximately 16.3 percent (50.5 million) of the total U.S. population (308.7 million in 2010). As the fastest growing segment of the population, Latinos now live in every state of the country and in every major city across America. By 2010, Los Angeles, the second largest city in the U.S. (3.8 million in 2010), was 48.5 percent (1,838,822) Latino and 29.4 percent Caucasian (in 2009), making the city’s racial composition a “minority-majority” (all racial groups included) with people of Mexican origin constituting the largest ethnic group of Latinas/os with 31.9 percent of the Los Angeles population in 2010 followed by Salvadorans (6.0%) and Guatemalans (3.6%), making Los Angeles the second largest Mexican city in the world, after Mexico City. At the state level, California, New Mexico, and Texas are already minority-majority states (all racial/ethnic groups included). In fact, New Mexico, having the highest percentage of Latinos (46% in 2010), not including other racial/ethnic minorities, is already approaching 50 percent Latina/o with the majority being Mexican Americans.

In fact, within one year the ethnic demographic trend quickly shifted the ethnic/race landscape. Nationally, Latinos, the fastest growing, numbered 52 million (16.7%) in 2011, increasing by 3.1 percent since 2010. Regarding ethnic demographics, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of July 2011,