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Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation by Gilbert G. Gonzalez (review)

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Collectively, these original essays successfully fulfill the editors' intended purpose of bringing works on colonial Texas in line with the new social history approach found in writings of post-1836 Texas, portraying the various folks residing in eighteenth-century Texas as subjects who played active roles in voicing the political needs of their community, and noting the connection between Borderlands and Mexican American history. Indeed, after reading *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio*, Chicano historians will have to reconsider the generally accepted definition of Chicano history as beginning with the American domination of Mexico's Far North and thus an experience molded by life in the United States instead of Spain or Mexico.

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ARNOLDO DE LEÓN

Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation. By Gilbert G. Gonzalez. (Cranbury, N.J.: Balch Institute Press, 1990. Pp. 204. Acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50.)

This study is a Marxist critique of public education in the Southwest during the era of de jure segregation. The major focus is on educational policy adapted to the "special needs" of a linguistically and culturally distinct Mexican community—policy that resulted in intelligence testing, tracking, curriculum differentiation, vocational education, and segregated schools. Within the larger political economy, the public school processed the Mexican student as an item of quality control. Gilbert Gonzales focuses on the theoretical and practiced methods of this control and holds it up for rigid analysis.

Briefly, Gonzalez divides his subject into seven chapters dealing with Americanization programs, theories of education, actual practices, Inter-American and Intercultural education, the *Mendez v. Westminster* case of 1947, and continuity and change in the education of Chicano children up to 1975. His organization and presentation of materials are based on Marxist assumptions; namely the idea of some monolithic political economy, not merely based on race, that directed segregation in the Southwest. Granted, race/class segments exist in the United States, but Gonzalez provides no satisfactory evidence to make this assumption convincing. He makes a good stab at it in chapter 1 with the general theory of organic society, but the history of special interest groups and the marketplace does not materialize. As he excludes different "Hispano" educational experiences from analysis, he gives us a special difference. As Guadalupe San Miguel has displayed in Texas, Mexican Americans were not passive participants in de jure segregation.

Gonzalez argues that public schools in the Southwest sought to assimilate Mexican Americans through a rigorous program of Americanization. School officials designed their curriculum in order to foster a disciplined, well-behaved-source of cheap labor for low-skill industries of the Southwest. Mexican Americans are seen as "feudal" victims of the dominant-subordinate relationships that existed prior to World War II. Moreover, as monopoly capitalism solidified and the race/class structure remained unchallenged, state policies and the impact of U.S. interests internationally operated much the same way, particularly

in the workings of U.S. foreign policy. Interestingly, Gonzalez believes that educational equity will be seen in the Southwest when Mexico emerges as a developed nation. Given the nature of global relationships, we may be the underdeveloped one.

Gonzales does an excellent job in discussing the *Mendez v. Westminster* case, based on complaints of Mexican Americans against several southern California schools that placed their children in separate facilities. As a landmark decision, this first federal application of the Fourteenth Amendment to overturn segregation based on the "separate but equal" doctrine, had far-reaching implications. In Texas, the *Delgado v. Bastrop* (1948) case reaffirmed *Mendez* and represented a major victory against segregation in Texas schools. Still, as Gonzalez notes, schooling for Mexican children continued to come under the influence of pseudoscientific intelligence testing, tracking, vocational education, and Americanization programs.

An oversight in the bibliography weakens Gonzalez's work. It is incomplete. Various titles and dates do not conform to those cited in the endnotes. It appears that revisions were made to the text, but the bibliography was not revised. Also, the overall thesis is much too rigid. Gonzalez himself is forced to make exceptions.

University of Texas-Pan American

ROBERTO M. SALMÓN

Poorest of Americans: The Mexican Americans of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

By Robert Lee Maril. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. Pp. xi+228. Preface, introduction, map, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95, cloth; \$10.95, paper.)

This is an important book about a largely ignored subregion of the U.S.-Mexico border. The author presents a description of living conditions of the Mexican American population of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Maril begins with a detailed look at statistics that leaves little doubt as to the extreme poverty prevalent in this region. He goes on to examine the origins of this state of affairs. He describes first the initial settlement of the area by the conquistadores and the hybrid class, race, caste system that resulted. In the twentieth century the economy of the area took off, based mostly on agriculture. But together with this growth there was considerable growth in poverty. The valley is rich in resources. The poverty is a consequence of a set of political and social structures, including bossism and racism, that perpetuates the prosperity of the few at the expense of the many. This situation Maril synthesizes via the concept of the valley as an internal colony. The structural nature of the poverty implies that it is not limited to wages and income. It includes abysmally low levels of education, poor health, substandard housing. Because of that Maril suggests the solution cannot be limited to pouring money into the area. Rather, the political and social structure would have to change. Factors such as the role of undocumented workers in the region's economy need to be reexamined.

This book makes a welcome contribution to the study of a subregion within the U.S.-Mexico border. Maril sifts through a large body of useful data, for ex-