



# A Chicano Perspective on San Diego History

By MARIO T. GARCIA

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In 1970 a project to compose and publish an anthology to be called *New Perspectives on Chicano History* was initiated by Dr. Carlos Cortes, Professor of History at the University of California, Riverside, and Professor Pedro Castillo, Professor of Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. This project was intriguing because of the lack of any "Old Perspectives on Chicano History," except the idea held by numerous social scientists which insisted or implied, that Chicanos have no history. Such a view results from the conclusion of social scientists such as William Madsen and Lyle Saunders that Chicanos, besides being ahistorical, possess a Traditional Culture: a culture that is stagnant, non-progressive, and static. Thus, because Chicanos are incapable of doing anything due to their regressive culture, and have done nothing, they possess no history.

Octavio Romano has forcefully rebutted these arguments, and it should be emphasized that this view of influential scholars is not only naive, but racist.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone and everything has a history. A table, a chair has a history! These views would not be important if they were confined to the "no man's land" of academia; however, this is not the case, and the result has been a widespread distortion, for these views have permeated and influenced the thoughts and conceptions that many people—including teachers, employers and even Chicanos—hold concerning Mexicans in our society. Not only have Chicanos been presented as ahistorical and the adherents of a Traditional Culture, but they have been indicted as being Un-American. Perhaps the most influential advocate of such a view is sociologist Celia Heller, who in her *Mexican-American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads*, writes that Chicanos are the least "Americanized" of all minority groups in the United States. What Heller implies is that until Chicanos get rid of their Mexican culture and assimilate into the Anglo-American "way of life," they will be considered un-American.<sup>2</sup>

These are the types of distorted, racist views Chicanos have endured for many years. They are stereotypes which have produced what Samuel Ramos, in writing of Mexicans in general, called the "Mexican inferiority complex": an uncertainty of iden-

tity, a feeling that what is Mexican is not as valuable or worthy as what can be considered Anglo-American or European.<sup>3</sup> This stripping of identity is a result of the oppression and exploitation of Chicanos in this country, and relates to a historical theme discussed later.

Suffice it to say that the neglect on the part of historians and social scientists of the history of the Mexican in this country has produced a great injustice to Chicanos, and they are reacting by saying "Basta" — Enough! They will no longer accept this "intellectual colonialism," and have concluded that Chicanos must write and teach their own history, their own sociology, anthropology, etc., and not allow others to do it for them, for it is evident that these "scholars" and writers have manufactured a series of stereotypes running the gamut from the "sleeping, inebriated, sexist" characters of Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* to the mass media celebrity: the "Frito Bandito."

These are the handicaps Chicano historians face, and they are attempting to eliminate these obstacles by rewriting the history of the West and Southwest to come closer to the truth about the society they live in, or, in their case, under. They come to this task, not as "orthodox" historians, but as historians who come out of the Chicano Movement. They are not isolated intellectuals who simply interpret the Movement or write the history of Mexicans in the United States, but are, or should be, activists in the profound nationalist phenomena that is the Chicano Movement. As a consequence, there exists an emergence of Chicano scholars and writers who are not separated from reality, nor the masses, for they closely associate with the people; they represent one element of the vanguard that attempts to politicize the "gente"—the Chicano people. In so doing, they follow the footsteps of such intellectual activists as Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson; of José Martí and Che Guevara; and of Lenin and Trotsky.

Included in the anthology is an article I wrote entitled "The Bolton Theory and Chicano History."<sup>4</sup> Herbert Eugene Bolton, whom many recognize as the most influential historian of the so-called "Spanish Borderlands," possessed many misconceptions about the Southwest; however, he did have a view of American history which represents

a correct one. This view, which has become known as "the Bolton Theory," was expressed in a presidential address Bolton delivered at the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association in Toronto in 1932.<sup>3</sup> In this address, Bolton argued that a broader treatment of American history is needed. It is needed in order to remove American history from a strictly chauvinistic basis. "European history cannot be learned," Bolton argued,

from books dealing alone with England, or France, or Germany, or Italy, or Russia; nor can American history be adequately presented if confined to Brazil, or Chile, or Mexico, or Canada, or the United States. In my own country the study of thirteen English colonies and the United States in isolation has obscured many of the larger factors in their development, and helped to raise up a nation of chauvinists. Similar distortion has resulted from the teaching and writing of national history in other American countries.<sup>4</sup>

What Bolton called for was a study of American history beyond the confines of the United States or of any individual American nation. American history should be hemispheric history: a study of the common factors in the development of the Western Hemisphere. Bolton understood the practical necessity of such a wide-ranging history, for he was making his appeal at the dawn of Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy." "The increasing importance of inter-American relations makes imperative," Bolton insisted, "a better understanding by each of the history and the culture of all."<sup>5</sup> Yet, it was from an intellectual rather than a political perspective that Bolton presented his theory. As he put it, a larger view of American history was essential not only for its political and commercial implications, but "it is quite desirable from the standpoint of correct historiography."<sup>6</sup>

It was Bolton's purpose to suggest that there exists common threads in the histories of the American nation-states, indeed, in the histories of all American people. And that each national history can best be understood in relation to that of the other American nations.<sup>7</sup>

What do these nations, these people, have in common? Bolton believed there are

many similarities in the backgrounds of the American nations. Similarities in colonial systems exist: each experienced the effects of mercantalism, feudalism, black slavery, of the subjugation of the Native Americans, and of the influence of the frontier. Each faced the issue of independence, of consolidating that independence, and of structuring a nation-state.<sup>8</sup> This is not to imply that Bolton did not believe there existed differences in America, but as Lewis Hanke suggests, Bolton simply judged it wiser to stress similarities because of the previous emphasis on the gulf between the United States and the rest of the Americas.<sup>9</sup> Similarities, common history, the "Epic of Greater America," this is what Bolton deemed important.

Accepting the "Bolton Theory," it can be argued that Chicano history can best be studied and understood by using the comparative method, and in so doing the obvious theory to apply is Bolton's. If common historical strands exist in American history, what must be done is to discover where the Chicano experience fits in.

Historians must compare the Chicano experience with that of other peoples in the Americas. What common elements, for example, are to be found in Chicano culture with that of the Anglo-American? With the Mexican? With the Brazilian? The Cuban? What common political, economic, and social issues do Chicanos share with other groups in this hemisphere, as well as with others in Europe, Africa, and Asia?

Studies could be done on such topics as: the comparison of Mexican immigration to the United States with that of other groups not only to this country, but to the rest of the Americas; the comparison of Chicano migration from rural areas to urban ones with similar American movements; a comparison of the impact of industrialization on the Chicano with that of other American people; the comparison of the growth of the Chicano labor movement with other labor movements in America; a comparison of the rise of a Chicano middle class with that of other middle-class movements, in Mexico, for example; the comparison of anti-colonial sentiments among Chicanos with similar sentiments in other American areas. There is no question that by using Bolton's theory of a common American history the study of the Chicano experience in the United States

will be enhanced, and the result will be a rich source of historical writing.

If the Bolton Theory in the examination of Chicano history can be accepted, and if the study of American history in its widest scope is valid, what is the relationship of all this to San Diego history? The relationship is that the Bolton view is extremely essential, if not crucial, in the understanding of the history of a city, which represents a microcosm of American society, and the term American is used in its Boltonian sense. There is in San Diego a variety of historical and cultural influences, but there is no question the two pre-dominant ones are the Anglo-American and the Mexican. The Bolton Theory, which condemns a United States monopolization of "American history," also should be applied in the study of San Diego history, so that it not be dominated by the Anglo-American influence. What is needed is to "Americanize" or "Boltonize," San Diego history. This has not been the case, and the history of Mexicans in San Diego has been neglected and almost omitted. While it is true there are a number of studies on the period before the United States conquest in 1848, almost nothing has been done about the history of Chicanos after this time. The histories of the pre-conquest period, moreover, have tended to be overly romanticized. This results from the numerous misconceptions and distortions scholars possess about the Spanish heritage in the Southwest. Carey McWilliams has correctly labeled this distortion the "Spanish Fantasy," and fantasy it is!<sup>12</sup>

A mis-representation of the conquistadores, friars, and rancheros has given rise to a vision of giants; although, they were much less, and from a Chicano perspective appear as aggressive and cruel exploiters of Indians and lower class Mexicans: the cholos. An essential ingredient of this "Spanish Fantasy" has been to portray this history as one of white men, of Spaniards, and, therefore, of Europeans. Yet, as McWilliams points out, very few "blue-blooded" Spaniards even entered the Southwest. If we can remember that California was exposed to "European" settlement 248 years after Cortez conquered Mexico, we can appreciate the fact that most of those who entered the Southwest were mestizos, people of mixed blood and, consequently, Mexicans.



Illustration by Victor Ochoa  
Director, Centro Cultural De La Raza  
Balboa Park, San Diego

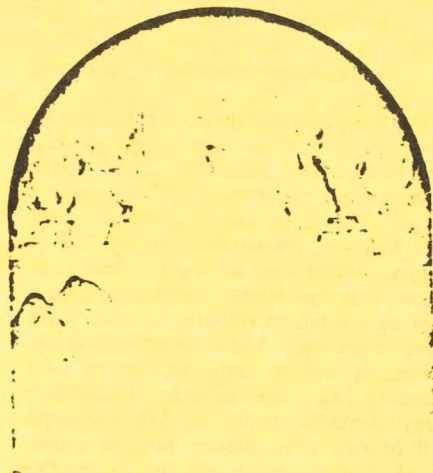
### MURAL TRIPTICO

This three-paneled mural in Montezuma Hall at the Aztec Center, California State University, San Diego, depicts the Chicano's painful history. The artist, Gilberto Ramirez, who lives in Mexico, was assisted by artists Ruben DeAnda and Guillermo Aranda. Description of the mural is provided by the Associated Students Organization at the Aztec Center.

Bolton, unfortunately, possessed much of this "Spanish Fantasy." In an article published in 1930 entitled "Defensive Spanish Expansion and the Significance of the Borderlands," Bolton made the point that the Southwest was the "meeting place and the fusing place of two streams of European civilization, one coming from the south (the Spanish), and the other from the north (the English)."<sup>11</sup> And in describing the Spanish influence in the Southwest, Bolton mentioned the continued use of the Spanish language, the fact that names of states, rivers, mountains, possessed Spanish names.<sup>14</sup> "Many towns have Spanish quarters," he wrote, "where the life of the old days goes on, and where one can always hear the soft Castilian tongue."<sup>15</sup>

Chicanos know there are very few, if any, places in the Southwest where the "soft Castilian tongue" can be heard! The point is that Bolton did not recognize that the civilization of the area at the time of the United States conquest was not Spanish, but Mexican. It was a mestizo society, one which had fused the Indian elements with the Spanish ones to create a distinct national culture. Earl Pomeroy is quite correct when he writes that, "the role of Spanish culture in the Southwest has been exaggerated from the days of Helen Hunt Jackson and the Ramona legend to the day of the latest real estate speculator who manufactures Spanish-sounding place names."<sup>14</sup>

It is important to sound scholarship that before any valid consideration can be made with respect to Chicano history in San Diego; the myths, legends, and distorted history that is the "Spanish Fantasy" must be destroyed. The fact is that the historical roots of San Diego are Indian and mestizo, and since 1848, Anglo-American. With this recognition, San Diego, hopefully, will not be treated to another unreal spectacle, such as the 1969 bi-centennial celebration, where the "Spanish Fantasy" was disgustingly in

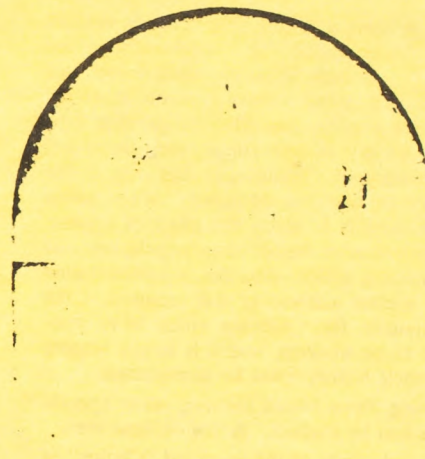


CREPUSCULO (Sunset)

"The culture of the people of the sun is destroyed; its sun descends; Coatlicue, she of the serpent skirt, mother of the cultures, from the depth of the centuries contemplates its own destruction; El Tzompantli, its tzompantli will no longer be large enough to honor its dead; The Landscape, symbolized by pyramids and volcanic cones, trepid because of the thundering clash and mixture of two temperaments—the strength and chivalry of the Spaniard, the sensibility and mysticism of the Indian; the Mestizo is born, fruit of violence and pain, his face reflects the pain of his birth, sanctified by religion, half sword half cross."

evidence, and Chicanos made to feel they had no part to play in the heritage of California.

In San Jose the merchants of the city sponsored a "Fiesta de las Rosas" to celebrate the bi-centennial. Chicanos were not taken into consideration, and few were asked to participate; the result was San Jose's version of the "Fantasy." Chicanos, however, refused to allow San Jose to deceive herself, and marched and demonstrated against the myth, with the consequence that many Chicano "carnales and carnalas"—brothers and

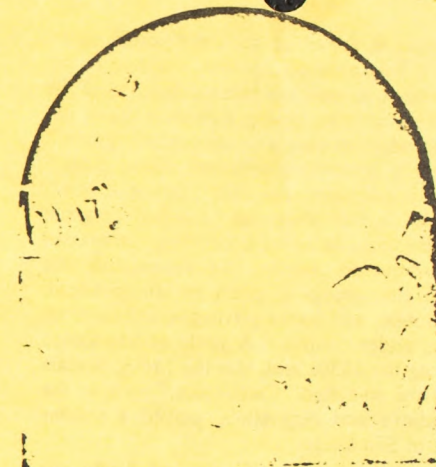


NOCHE (Night)

"With its independence recently acquired from Europe, Mexico suffers a new strike, this time it's his powerful neighbor in America who delivers this homicidal strike, the country is divided. The children of the sun look at their father in vain; The Mexican cries the separation of his brothers who were left on the other side of the border, but united in sentiment, symbolized by the hearts; El Chicano without language, prisoner of a system based upon the sacrifice of peoples, also cries, and there begins to germinate in him the idea of social justice and fraternity among all peoples of the world."

sisters—were beaten, arrested, and jailed, all so that San Jose could go on with her self-deception.

There are three essential themes that must be examined to arrive at a realistic understanding of the Chicano experience in San Diego since 1848, which will allow San Diego history to become "Americanized" in the Boltonian sense and not in the Celia Heller sense. These three—and they are inter-related—are colonialism, the growth of U.S. capitalism in San Diego, and the class structure of the city.



AMANECER (Dawn)

"Night ends, the new days is here, is beginning now; all the young of the world symbolized by one couple in which the new life germinates to form the new race, they make the new day; with the destruction of the machineman, of the robot, and of all the absurd systems based upon the sacrifice of men, the new day begins, the new day of fraternity among all peoples of the world, the world that all the young united as one must build."

Illustrations courtesy of the Associated Students Organization, California State University, San Diego.

The conquest of the Southwest, despite the propaganda of Manifest Destiny, was a war of aggression and colonialism by the United States. As such, even though the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) guaranteed the Mexican in the Southwest equal protection of the law and equal status with Anglo-Americans, the fact remains that the Mexican was subjugated, robbed of his lands, and exposed to a colonial system in many respects similar to those Europeans established in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. If one examines the history of San Diego,

evidence is found of such a colonial structure. For example, Frantz Fanon in his studies of colonialism reveals that one of the initial strategies of the colonizer is to develop what he calls a "national bourgeoisie," which is generally the former ruling class.<sup>17</sup> The justification for this "national bourgeoisie" is that they can be asked to assist the colonizer in better controlling the masses of conquered people. To accomplish this goal, this group is given certain political, economic, and social privileges, although always under control. A study of San Diego during the 1850s and, into the 1860s, reveals that the so-called "Californios," such as the Bandini's and Arguello's, played a similar role in San Diego.

An important ramification of Anglo colonialism in San Diego is, and was, the development among the Mexican population of a "colonial mentality," the feeling of inferiority. This, as Fannon and Albert Memmi point out, is a conscious attempt by the colonizer to strip the native population of any identity or sense of nationalism for the purpose of more effective manipulation.<sup>18</sup> This attempt, however, does not always work, and adverse reactions to colonialism appear. One obvious reaction in San Diego is the outbreak in the 1850s, 60s, and into the 1870s of so-called "Mexican banditry." Yet, as Eric Hobsbawm has insisted, even though banditry has generally been considered as nothing but criminal deviations, in actuality, it represents a profound reaction against injustice and oppression, and in the case of San Diego, it stands as a nationalist movement against Anglo-American rule.<sup>19</sup>

These are only a few of the ways in which colonialism in San Diego history and the role of the Mexican under such a system can be considered. Anglo-American colonialism is a reality in the Southwest, and the study of Chicanos must be seen and studied in this light.

The capitalist development of San Diego represents a second theme that can be used to study the history of Chicanos since 1848. By the 1870s San Diego began to undergo a profound change from a pastoral economy to an agricultural and commercial one. By the "Boom of the Eighties," as Glenn Dumke has shown, with the entrance of the railroad, San Diego experienced a significant growth.<sup>20</sup> This development was done under a capi-

talist system: a system that revolves around what Marx called the "surplus theory of labor." As such, Mexicans represented, and into the twentieth century continue to do so, a source of cheap labor for the growing capitalist society of San Diego, and, therefore, the history of Chicanos in this city is the history of workers, of labor. What needs to be done is to study the effect of capitalist dynamics on the Mexican population, and in so doing arrive—and this is a third theme—at a class analysis of this segment of the population, for Chicanos since 1848 continue to be workers, and it is in this respect that their history must be constructed.

Using these broad themes, more specific areas can be studied. A few of these are:

1. A study of the so-called "Cholos" or lower class Mexicans in the second half of the nineteenth century.
2. The use of Mexican labor—if any—on the building of railroads into San Diego.
3. The educational system and Mexicans in the period following the U.S. conquest.
4. Mexican immigration, especially during the Mexican Revolution of 1910.
5. The role of Mexicans in San Diego during the Mexican Revolution.
6. Mexican participation in I.W.W. activities during the early twentieth century.
7. The role of San Diego Mexicans during the First World War.
8. The effects of the Depression on Mexicans in San Diego.
9. The influx of Mexicans into San Diego during the 20's and 30's from the rural areas.
10. The impact of World War II on San Diego Chicanos: Zoot Suit Riots during the war.
11. The Post-war Chicano community: the development of a civil rights movement among Chicanos: G.I. Forum, Unity League, etc.
12. The effects of the Korean War on the Mexican population.
13. "Operation Wetback" in the middle 50's and its impact on Chicanos in San Diego.
14. The political status of Mexicans in San Diego and their participation in politics during the 50's and 60's:

MAPA in San Diego; Viva Kennedy and Viva Johnson Clubs.

15. The Chicano Movement of the 60's: students, farmworkers, Raza Unida, etc.

The study of these themes, of course, depends on a close scrutiny of the sources. This presents a problem: the apparent lack of sources for the study of Chicanos in San Diego. This is sometimes given as an excuse, however, to avoid dealing with Chicano history. While there are more difficulties in finding materials relating to Chicanos, there does exist sufficient resource to develop the ideas suggested. Local libraries and archives, as well as state depositories offer places to begin this research. Likewise, a study of similar bodies in Baja California and Mexico offer another possible source of information. Municipal and county records are good sources of material, as well as private depositories such as church records.

In conjunction with the search for sources, one area that needs immediate treatment is the field of oral history. There are many older Chicanos who have lived in San Diego for a long time; these people need to be interviewed and their recollections recorded, for written documentation, as many historians will acknowledge, is only part of the record.

In conclusion, let me make some suggestions to local and state historical societies and to colleges, universities and libraries throughout the country about areas in which they can be helpful in the development of Chicano history in San Diego. These organizations and institutions can begin to collect the numerous Chicano documents and news-

papers—San Diego's *La Jolla* for example—that are now published. These should be collected and preserved for study by students and scholars. Out of this activity should come special Chicano historical collections: collections administered by Chicanos. These institutions should sponsor and fund special projects by Chicanos relating to Chicano history, including the development of oral history. Scholarships and contributions should be made to Chicano students wishing to major in history, especially of the Southwest and Mexico, or in Chicano studies. These institutions should sponsor and fund the publication of historical materials by Chicanos. Chicanos should be appointed to the various decision making bodies of these institutions, especially Boards of Editors.

Finally, members of these organizations and institutions should study and be aware of what is being done in Chicano history and Chicano studies by reading the materials written by Chicanos, and by taking or auditing courses offered by Chicano Study Departments.

If these things, among many others, are done, and if the study of San Diego history is carried out in the spirit of the "Bolton Theory," then we will arrive at an honest conception of our reality today. History is a tool; it is a vehicle that can allow us to see the mistakes of the past, and to see the roots of our current problems. If we acknowledge these mistakes and recognize the historical foundations of our present-day crisis between Whites and Chicanos in San Diego, then we will be better able to deal with these issues, and to better understand the obvious conclusions that history is thrusting upon us.

## FOOTNOTES

1. See Octavio I. Romano-V, "The Anthropology and Sociology of the Mexican-Americans," *El Grito*, Vol. II (Fall, 1968), pp. 13-26.
2. See Celia S. Heller, *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads* (New York, 1968), p. 4.
3. Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (Austin, 1968).
4. This will appear in Carlos Cortes and Pedro Castillo (ed.), *New Perspectives on Chicano History* (to be published in 1972 or 1973).
5. Herbert Eugene Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," in Bolton, *Wider Horizons of American History* (New York, 1939), pp. 1-34.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
11. Lewis Hanke (ed.), *Do the Americas Have a Common History* (New York, 1968), pp. 46-47.
12. See Chapter Two in Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico* (New York, 1968), pp. 35-47.
13. Bolton, *Wider Horizons*, p. 98.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Earl Pomeroy, "Toward a Reorientation of Western History: Continuity and Environment," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (March, 1933), pp. 379-600.
17. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1968).
18. See Albert Memmi, *Dominated Man* (New York, 1968).
19. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1963).
20. Glenn S. Dumke, *The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California* (San Marino, 1944).