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Disrupting the Master Narrative: Mexican Americans in the Borderlands

Cecilia N. Sánchez-Hill

Abstract: Including the perspective and experiences of people of Mexican origin living in the borderlands when teaching both US History and Texas History provides educators with the opportunity to trouble the master narrative and aid in the dismantling of white supremacy in the United States. This paper demonstrates the ways in which the history of Mexicanos in the American Southwest disrupts the long-held myths of American expansionism and exceptionalism that Social Studies educators teach in Texas classrooms. Changing the historical narrative educators teach can end the erasure of the culture and contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to the development of the Southwestern United States that perpetuates the labeling of all Mexican origin people as *foreigner* and not American.

Keywords: TEKS, curriculum, Mexican American, borderland, master narrative, identity

“If frontiers were the places where we once told our master American narratives, then borderlands are the places where those narratives come unraveled”
(Hämäläinen and Truett, 2011, p. 338).

The Old Hidalgo Pumphouse with its steam powered irrigation pumps transformed the land around the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas in the early twentieth century. It became an agricultural wonder with an ability to produce through all four seasons of the year. Surrounded by a National Wildlife Refuge, the century old building and smokehouse are now a museum and World Birding Center with rare species of butterflies, numerous species of birds, the Old Swimming Hole, and a thirty-four foot high border wall topped with military grade barbed wire fencing. The border wall aims to prevent the movement of human bodies from Mexico into the United States. Although this natural environment is an ideal space for bird watchers, the

Cecilia N. Sánchez Hill teaches in the Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies Department at Texas Christian University. The author may be contacted at cecilia.hill@tcu.edu.

sound of the Border Patrol trucks dragging massive tires through the road to smooth out the dirt, making any new footprints visible to agents, intermittently interrupts any tranquility the bird watchers may reach. Visitors to the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse can follow a path through the soothing wildlife refuge and eventually make their way to the border wall. The dirt road next to the border leads to a main thoroughfare with a tall Whataburger sign in clear view, just a few hundred feet away from the wall, a meeting spot for loved ones who make it across. Visitors who make this quarter mile stroll will see numerous shoelaces scattered in the dirt and brush, a symbol of the Border Patrol's requirement that all undocumented people they take into custody remove their shoelaces [1]. During a Texas Christian University Justice Journey trip in March 2019, a tour guide said that, "each of these laces represented an unfulfilled dream."

Established in the late 1920s, the Border Patrol began monitoring and regulating the movement of Mexicans across a line negotiated and agreed upon by men in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). The volume and the militarization of the mechanisms used to keep Mexican citizens on their side of the border increased throughout the twentieth century, attempting, and at times succeeding, in dividing families, nature, and laborers from work. From an enlarged Border Patrol, to the various deportation projects over the last one hundred years, as well as official and unofficial strategies to erase

the brownness of Mexican Americans, the xenophobic United States government has continuously attempted to create both a physical and cultural barrier that distinguishes *American* from *foreigner*. As evidenced by the presence of numerous shoelaces along the border in Hidalgo County, more than 170 years after dividing the region into two separate nations, the Mexican and American people are still connected. However, for people of Mexican origin, living in the borderlands is more than just negotiating a physical space divided by a militarized piece of land. Life in the American Southwest, described by Chicanos as the mythical homeland of the Mexica (Aztecs) known as Aztlán, is a place where, over time, people of Mexican origin formed new identities, contested the meaning of those identities, struggled for control over land, fought for political power, and challenged the dominant culture to preserve and celebrate their own. This border wall in Hidalgo or any other physical feature elsewhere in the American Southwest does not and never has cleanly divided the people of the region into Americans and Mexicans.

In this paper I focus on the history of the Mexicanos living in the borderlands beginning with the creation of a Mexican/American border in 1848, to the politically engaged Chicanas and Chicanos of the 1970s. I highlight the numerous ways their lived experiences disrupt the master narrative Social Studies educators teach in Texas classrooms. I use the term Mexicanos when referring to all ethnically Mexican people regardless of their

[1] If you look closely of the image "Crying Girl on the Border," you can see both mother and her 2-year-old child are missing their shoelaces. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/12/us/crying-girl-john-moore-immigration-photo-of-the-year/index.html>

citizenship status, while Mexican American refers specifically to American citizens of Mexican descent. Chicana/o is briefly used when discussing the Mexican Americans who self-identified with this term that makes a direct connection with their indigenous heritage (the Aztecs called themselves Mexicas, pronounced Meshica). I argue that disrupting the master narrative through the teaching of the lived experiences of Mexicanos in the borderlands aids in dismantling white supremacy in the United States. This perspective of history demonstrates not only the presence of Mexicans on the land that becomes the US but also reveals truths left out the narrative. In addition to troubling Texas and US historical myths, teaching this more inclusive narrative is a necessary step in ending the historical erasure and modern day attempts of the elimination of Brown bodies from the American landscape.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Standards and Literature Review

Predictably, the history curriculum, informed by the TEKS, educators teach in schools in Texas do not fully include these Mexicanos with a vibrant culture who were and are essential and active members of this region's society. The first mention of the American Southwest in Social Studies classes is in the fourth grade when teachers tell the story of white American *heroes* who fought for freedom against *tyrannical* Mexicans, represented by Santa Anna. Seventh grade teachers cover the Mexican Period in Texas and the Texas Revolution

in more detail than in fourth grade; however, students learn the history from the perspective of the white Texans rather than the Mexicans who lived and experienced the various governments, leaders, and cultures that shifted from Spanish to Mexican to Texan, and finally, to American all in less than three decades. In the eighth grade, middle school students learn the consequences of purportedly violating American sovereignty: the superior American military fights a fair and square war against their aggressors, the inferior Mexicans, as demonstrated by their loss and their decision to give up part of their land, become American citizens, and according to the treaty signed, are entitled to all the rights of citizenship, and lastly, the American government pays fifteen million dollars to Mexico for its trouble. The final time US history classes in Texas mention Mexican Americans in the Southwest is in the eleventh grade. The master narrative of US history merely sprinkles moments of Mexican American history: deportation during the Great Depression, Mexicans are a separate ethnicity and protected by the 14th Amendment (*Hernandez v. Texas*), Chicanos also fought for civil rights and created murals, and a couple Mexican men (Cesar Chavez, Roy Benavidez) and one woman (Dolores Huerta) are important enough to mention. In fact, the founder of the American G.I. Forum, Dr. Hector P. Garcia did not make the cut in the 2018 revisions of the TEKS.

With a focus on new definitions of power, movement across interconnected spaces, identity formation and transculturation,

and the importance of localized storytelling that amplifies marginalized voices, borderlands history provides an avenue to unravel master narratives of US history (Hämäläinen and Truett, 2011).

Historians have used their expertise in their respective fields to analyze histories in the American Southwest, where borders collide, to do just that. Limerick (1987) upended the narrative of Western (she also discusses the “Hispanic Borderlands” in her chapters on Mexican Americans) history with her groundbreaking book, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. Realizing that people with origins from all over the globe found their way to the American West, Limerick (1987), turned her gaze from the “westward movement of white men” to “reallocate attention to minorities” and to “pay attention to the difference between women’s and men’s experiences, whatever their ethnicity” (p. 6). According to Limerick (1987), by focusing on the experiences of those who history has typically ignored or placed in the margins, the conquest of the West becomes the dominant narrative that shapes and informs the present, “as the old mines shape the mountainsides” (p. 18). With this new perspective, her readers no longer understand the interactions between white cowboys, noble savages, Mexican bandits, and the Spanish elite as a snapshot of the past with no consequences for the twenty-first-century social, political, or economic lives of the people in the borderlands.

In the field of carceral studies, Hernández (2017) traced the imprisonment of marginalized groups in the settler colonial society of Southern California in *City of*

Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965. Using Los Angeles as a case study, Hernández (2017) argued that the history of human caging in the United States is both an effect and a tool of settler colonialism. Beginning with the Spanish’s systematic steps in taking land from the various Native peoples through Anglo-American settlement, those people with power in the city used incarceration as a means of eliminating anyone deemed unworthy of inclusion. One of the many strengths of Hernández’s (2017) analysis is her thorough dive into what she calls “the rebel archives” (p. 4). Considering the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) intentional destruction and unwillingness to share historic records of LA’s jails her ability to write this book with incredible detail is impressive. According to Hernández (2017), “comprised mostly of broken locks, secret codes, handbills, scribbled manifestos, and songs, the rebel archive found refuge in far-flung boxes and obscure remnants... their rebellions broke across bars and borders, changing the world in which they lived” (p. 4). Her analysis and use of this rebel archive centers the role of incarceration and settler colonialism in the story of the borderlands. Hernández (2017) makes it clear that through these incarceration projects, white colonizers, like the *heroes* of the Texas Revolution, removed Black and Brown bodies from the spaces they desired, clearing the way for their expansion. This new narrative challenges the notion of the westward expansion of the United States as a destiny, blessed by Providence, to cultivate unsettled lands and to bring religion, democracy, and the free market to ignorant Indians and Mexicans, made

manifest by the rugged, masculine, and gallant white adventurous pioneers.

Like the LAPD's efforts to hide and destroy the evidence of their uneven treatment of Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies in their prison systems, Martinez (2018) recovered the hidden history of anti-Mexican violence along the Texas border. Martinez (2018) argues that those people with the power to construct history deliberately hid evidence of racially motivated violence that terrorized Mexicans in South Texas in the first decades of the twentieth century to form a foundational story of a nation in which good triumphed over evil and a superior race fostered civilization among savages and bandits. She highlights the roles of Walter Prescott Webb, a professional historian and author of numerous publications regarding Texas and the frontier, along with local history curators, and museums in preserving white-washed, racist version of Texas history. Using both Spanish and English language newspapers, legal documents, and most importantly, family histories and oral interviews, *The Injustice Never Leaves You* (2018) tells the story left out of history books, lesson plans, museums, and monuments of the state sanctioned lynching of Mexicans by both vigilantes and the Texas Rangers. Martinez (2018) states in the introduction that this story is known by border historians but "forgotten in public memory," leaving the research to the victim's relatives (p. 8). Without the stories of anti-Mexican violence at the border included in the legacy of the Texas Rangers, the trope of the Mexican bandit terrorizing innocent white settlers persists and provides an easy path to perceiving

Mexicans today as inherently criminal.

Each of these examples demonstrates a needed shift in how we teach and remember the past. Recovering and reinterpreting the legacy of the conquest of the West sheds light on the strategies implemented by the dominant group to subdue and eliminate all those individuals blocking their path to control over land and resources. Operating without this knowledge of historical actors and the context of their actions leaves people in the present with a lack of understanding for the racial hierarchies that exist today. Tactically altering and erasing the memory of historical events is a powerful tool of white supremacy. Shifting the perspective and moving marginalized voices to the center of the story of the United States – Mexico borderlands reveals the fluidity of identity, the contestation of the meaning of those identities, and the resistance to life in a subordinate position socially, politically, and economically. Limerick (1987) does this by simply seeking the narratives of non-white settlers. Hernández (2017) and Martinez (2018) sought other ways of knowing through the rebel archive and family histories. Teaching this narrative not only rids the white supremacist narrative of its claim as the rightful owners of United States history, but it also reveals the vital people of Mexican origin and their vibrant Mexican culture that are essential to history and development of the American Southwest.

Discussion

The continuous efforts to define who does and does not belong in the United States, with many supposed benefits available for

the former group, and the deportation projects that come with these efforts is the backdrop to the shifting formations of identity for non-white people living in the American Southwest. A person's nationality and their ethnicity are two varying forms of identity. For the Mexicanos who were crossed by the border, the forceful conflation of the two forms of identity, through assimilation projects, and threats of deportation created an existence in which celebrating their ethnicity on both small and large scales was a dangerous endeavor. Living in the frontier of Spanish territory in North America during the nineteenth century meant that the men and women inhabiting these lands "molded their identities in the crucible of anticolonial movements, civil wars, intertribal alliances, utopian schemes, and harebrained land ventures" (Reséndez, 2006, p. 1). Taking on the label of Spanish, Mexican, Texan (or other regional identifier), or American at particular times in history may have opened doors to lucrative business opportunities, beneficial matrimonial matches, powerful political positions, or an individual's chosen identifier may have just represented an attempt at survival. Borderlands history provides an opportunity to study this formation of identities and transculturation in US history.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the national identities of the men and women residing in Spain's (and Mexico's) Far North did not simply change from Spanish to Mexican to American with the outcome of each colonial and national project. Nor did their regional

descriptions, like Tejano/a, Bexareño/a, Nuevo Mexicano/a, or Californio/a, statically define these men's and women's identities. The forces of the Mexican state in their establishment of bureaucratic systems, universal language, national celebrations, and religious rituals attempted to corral the loyalties of their people. However, the market economy of these frontier towns that evolved from the last stop on a trail that began in Mexico City to a valuable link in the borderlands for incoming American goods and outgoing Mexican commodities fought against the state's efforts. The ambiguity of national loyalties changes the narrative of the US – Mexico.

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constituted nation against another, one civilization project against another, and one people against another” (Reséndez, 2006, p. 264). By challenging this narrative, the importance of the early histories of Texas and the future states included in the Mexican Cession (1848) become vital in the story of the United States, and therefore, so does the history of the Mexican period. In Texas history classes, stories of the missions and presidios during the Spanish colonial period quickly transition to the influx of white Americans and the “heroism of the diverse defenders who gave their lives there [the Alamo],” leaving out the influence of Mexicans on the history of Texas (TEKS, Subchapter B. Middle School, p. 8). Learning that lesson allows proud white Texans today to appreciate the Spanish heritage of the Lone Star State while viewing Mexican culture as ahistorical with little to no value (sans the food) or foreign without any place in United States society. This erasure of the Mexican period in the history of Texas and the rest of the Southwest also allows Mexican origin people who trace their ancestral heritage to the original Spanish and mestizo settlers of these lands to think of themselves as distinctly different than Mexicans south of the border. Over time these Americans of Mexican decent developed their own political identities that created illusory walls rather than reflective mirrors between themselves and “los recién llegados (recent arrivals)” (Gutiérrez, 2007, p. 5).

As Mexico's Far North became the American Southwest, the Mexicans who lived north of the border defined by the

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo became citizens of the United States, but the United States did not necessarily treat them as such. Even though this geopolitical line aimed to demarcate Americans from foreigners, the porous border proved difficult to keep both Mexican bodies and Mexican culture out of the United States. Mexicans continued to move back and forth across the Southern border in search of labor opportunities and newly christened Americans of Mexican descent continued to celebrate Mexican Independence Day and engage in Federalist/Centralist debates about their homeland. Indeed, in some cases it took leaving Mexico and a shared anti-Mexican experience in the United States for many to adopt a sense of Mexicanidad and self-identifying as Mexican (Arredondo, 2008). Pursuing American citizenship felt like either a betrayal to the nation of their birth or meaningless considering the lack of upward mobility that accompanied the renouncement of one oath and an allegiance to another. Americans viewed this lack of assimilationist aspiration as evidence of the backwardness of Mexicans, their inferiority as a “mongrelized race of Indian, African, and Spanish ancestry,” and the absence of the necessary whiteness to become American (Foley, 199, p. 5). This lack of whiteness validated the enforcement of laws and customs that kept Mexicans in a subordinate position in society.

White Americans welcomed Mexican laborers, as long as they stayed in that subordinate role and did not challenge their station in society. In the early twentieth century, when Mexican miners

joined the Wobblies' (Industrial Workers of the World) efforts to mobilize against the copper-mining companies in Bisbee, Arizona, the Cochise County Sheriff, Harry Wheeler, along with the couple thousand deputized white civilians, labeled the miners as not American, rounded them up at gun point, loaded them on company boxcars, and shipped them into the New Mexico desert (Benton-Cohen, 2011). The ambiguities of race and its intersections with class and citizenship allowed Sheriff Wheeler to feel justified and on the right side of the law. He targeted those unsatisfied with their "Mexican wage" and asked, "Are you an American, or are you not?" (Benton-Cohen, 2011, p. 7-8). In *Becoming Mexican America*, Sanchez (1993) argued that the immigrant experience in adapting to the United States is not a homogenous, progressive, or linear process with the immigrant's culture on one end and American culture on the other. Even though white Americans, like Sheriff Wheeler, may have sharply delineated American from foreigner and believed that no room for someone in between existed, Mexicans living in the American Southwest had more fluid understanding of their identities. Studying a borderland's history reveals the legacies of transculturation, or the forming of a distinctive third culture from the intermingling of two others and reveals the vital roles these borderline Americans, using Benton-Cohen's (2011) moniker, had in the history and development of the region. Leaving the historical narratives of Mexicanos in the United States in the margins or completely off the page allows xenophobic Americans to perpetuate anti-Mexican rhetoric, legislation, and violence.

In addition to the fluidity of identity, examining US history from the perspective of the borderlands also reveals a politically engaged, organized people of Mexican origin who have struggled for control of their ancestral lands from the moment the United States violently stole them from Mexico. For students in Texas, their first introduction to the political engagement of Mexican Americans is the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In the eleventh grade the State of Texas expects students to "identify the roles of significant leaders who supported various rights movements, including . . . Cesar Chavez, [and] Dolores Huerta" (TEKS, Subchapter C. High School, p. 9). However, the Chicano Movement was not a centralized effort with a single focus or a movement with only one or two significant leaders, nor was it the birth of Mexican American's political identity.

There is a deep history of politically engaged Mexicanos in the land that became the United States. Beginning as early as mid-nineteenth century when the center of revolutionary fervor moved from Monclova in Coahuila to Béxar in Tejas, Tejanos contested their political freedoms and some pushed for independence from Mexico (Ramos, 2008). Originating in Mexico, Mexicans across the Southwest established mutualistas in response to the ruling white supremacist society taking over in the United States by the 1870s (Gutiérrez, 2007). These mutualistas provided funeral and disability benefits and also pooled community money to celebrate various cultural events, like Mexican Independence Day. Mutualistas continued after the turn of the century as Mexicans fled revolutionary Mexico and

settled in nascent urban centers and in colonias. A new generation of Mexicanos who, while continuing to celebrate their Mexicanidad, realized the benefit of speaking English and working within American systems to find a path toward upward mobility establishing the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC). One of LULAC's first initiatives aimed to end discrimination and segregation in education for Mexican Americans. In 1930, LULAC lawyers sued the Del Rio Independent School District in Texas on behalf of their named plaintiff, Jesús Salvatierra. Five years prior to this lawsuit and before the creation of LULAC, a Mexican family in Arizona sued the Tempe Board of Trustees in *Romo v Laird* (Valencia, 2010, pp. 13-14). This history is essential to understand the active and important role people of Mexican origin played in the development of the United States and its judiciary prior to the Great Depression when most Americans in the Southwest blamed their dire economic situation on the foreigners, a label that referred to all Mexicanos.

Mexican Americans continued to engage in local, state, and national politics during and after World War II. Whether increasing the number of Mexican registered voters through tamale drives, running for local political offices, or continuing to battle in the courts to end school segregation and discrimination, Mexicans living in the borderlands strengthened the foundation of activism built by their elders. Led in large part by Mexican American veterans and their American G.I. Forum, this wave of activism that adhered to the “cold war rhetoric of Americanism” aimed to

“expand Mexican American citizenship beyond the ‘third space’ of the insular barrio to patriotism, anticommunism, and a call for democracy” (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 28).

These men and women with their middle-class aspirations established Mexican American Chambers of Commerce, raised money for academic scholarships, and encouraged increased engagement in electoral politics. By 1960, these Mexican American grassroots organizations grew into chapters of the national Viva Kennedy presidential campaign in an effort to elect John F. Kennedy and his running mate Lyndon B. Johnson, a former teacher from the Texas – Mexico borderlands. The master narrative of US history leaves out the political actions and engagement of Mexicans throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. High school students in Texas leave their US history classes believing Mexicans in the United States did not develop a political consciousness until they witnessed the efforts of the Black freedom struggle.

The Chicano Movement or El Movimiento, while partly influenced by the actions of Black activists, also grew out of the long history of the politically engaged Mexican American community. This new, younger, and more radical wave of engagement, with an initially localized focus, consisted of multiple avenues of activism without any one central leader; however, several men and women stand out for their organization and leadership. Commonly referred to as the Four Horsemen of the Chicano Movement by its scholars, Cesar Chavez, Jose Angel Gutiérrez, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, and Reies López

Tijerina each engaged in various projects across the Southwest.

Texas classrooms only mention one of the Four Horsemen, Chavez. Social Studies teachers celebrate Chavez for his efforts in the farmworker's movement. He, along with Dolores Huerta led the initiative to ensure better working conditions and wages for farmworkers in California. Before founding the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) with other like-minded Mexican college students, Gutiérrez participated in the efforts to elect "Los Cinco," an "all-Latin" group of men, elected to the Crystal City, Texas City Council (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 46). Influenced by the politically aware and involved Mexican community of his hometown, Gutiérrez, helped organize MAYO and challenged mayors, congressmen, and the white establishment in San Antonio. While older than those he led, Gonzales established the Crusade for Justice. The Crusade rejected both the accommodationist rhetoric and the efforts to reform conventional American systems promoted by the previous generation of Mexican American activists. He and the Crusade aimed for self-determination for Chicanos. After penning the epic poem, "Yo Soy Joaquin," that expressed the realities of living as a descendent of both the conqueror and the conquered in Aztlán, Gonzales became the voice of the young militant Chicanos.

Like Gonzales, Tijerina was older than other Chicanos but his creation of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes, an organization dedicated to the restoration of land grants to the heirs of the original Spanish and Mexican settlers in New

Mexico, resonated with the Chicano youth who believed Americans stole Aztlán from their ancestors.

Tijerina led a small group of armed followers into a New Mexico courthouse to make a citizen's arrest of the local district attorney. While Tijerina's rhetoric appealed to fed-up Chicanos partly because of his willingness to take direct action, his critical view of the United States' expansion into the American Southwest reverberated across Chicano organizations. He believed the nation's colonial projects did not end with statehood in New Mexico and other conquered territories. In Tijerina's worldview, the United States government continued to subjugate Spanish-speaking people by denying them access to their rights as citizens, taking their land, and operating a judiciary that maintained white supremacy. According to historian Oropeza (2019), "the Alianza failed to return even one acre back to land-poor New Mexicans," but "equipped with a third-grade education and a Bible . . . Tijerina managed to rewrite the history of the American West" (p. 4).

Although it took Tijerina's actions in 1967 for the nation to turn their gaze to the plight of people with Mexican and Indigenous roots regarding land in the American Southwest, this struggle was not new. Identity is often tied to land. In other words, the two are intertwined and define each other. Since the earliest eighteenth-century Spanish settlements in California, elite Spaniards placed a high value on marrying a "daughter of the land," an Amerindian woman. By the nineteenth century, both Spaniards and the newly-

arrived white Americans viewed California-born Spanish/Mexican women as “daughters of the land,” devaluing Amerindian women (Casas, 2009, p. 8). By the twentieth century, several organizations and communities, who traced their origins to the first groups of white American forty-niners and settlers who called themselves pioneers, used the self-proclaimed label, “sons and daughters of the west,” or “Native Sons of the Golden West” (Casas, 2009, p. 9). By using these labels, white settlers successfully rewrote the history of the US – Mexico borderlands, eliminating both the Indigenous and Mexican claim to the land.

Before rewriting history, white settlers used various strategies to gain control over land. Whether using the intricacies of the American judiciary, irrigation projects that changed the flow of rivers away from Native and Mexican communities, or through the use of violence discussed by Hernández (2017) in *City of Inmates* and Martínez (2018) in *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, white settlers wrestled the land from Indigenous and Mexican communities. Nevertheless, these communities resisted. Mexicans in California attempted to navigate the English-only, foreign court systems to keep ownership of their lands until they had to sell pieces of the land to pay for the court fees or until they could no longer pay the taxes. In the late nineteenth century, Las Gorras Blancas in New Mexico organized a resistance against the encroachment of white settlers. They cut fences, burned down barns and haystacks, tore up railroad tracks to defend their lands, and set a precedent of Mexican resistance to injustice. Several members of

Las Gorras Blancas became elected officials in the early local and state governments of New Mexico (Weber, 2003). In Arizona, many ethnic Mexican families held on to their lands in the face of federal and state led efforts to shape the political economy into a racialized hierarchy with white people at the top. Using their abilities to build large scale irrigation projects, agencies in Arizona, like the Geological Society and the Army Corps of Engineers, displaced Mexican communities by taking away access to their water supply, forcing them off their land and into wage labor (Meeks, 2007). These histories not only reveal the historic and continued presence of Mexicans in the borderlands, they also support Tijerina’s worldview of the United States as a conqueror, operating a colonial empire within its borders. Even though scholars have researched and documented this rich history of Mexican American political consciousness and action in numerous publications beginning in the early 1970s, the standard narratives of US History do not include most of these stories, except for those of Chavez, and Huerta, and the United Farmworkers.

Also not included in the master US narrative, and often times left to the footnotes in histories written by Chicanos, or as Chicana activist Rosie Castro said, “the fucking footnotes,” are the defiance, political engagements, and leadership of women activists. Rosie Castro, a Chicana activists herself, expressed her frustration at a panel discussion I attended in March 2019 in San Antonio, Texas titled “Las Mujeres del Movimiento.” As early as the mid-nineteenth century arrival of the Bear Flaggers in California, Mexican woman

have resisted the subordinate status placed on them by both the *gabacho* (white people) and the *macho* (men including Mexican men). Rosalía Vallejo, a member of an elite California family stood her ground, without regard for any consequences, in denying white American conqueror, John C. Frémont's summons for a young Indian servant girl for his sexual pleasure (Casas, 2009). She also married a white American trader in defiance of the head of her family, her older brother, Mariano. As agents of cultural change, these women who married white settlers played a vital role in the history of California. However, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft (1884) erased the stories of these women when he wrote the first comprehensive history of California. Even though he and his assistant interviewed several woman, women's voices did not appear in his version of California history.

In the early twentieth century, Mexican women led labor movements. The same year white women gained the right to vote in the United States, Mexican American women led a laundry strike in El Paso, Emma Tenayuca led the strike of pecan shellers in San Antonio in the 1930s and thousands of Mexican and Mexican American women established a trade union in canneries in Southern California in the 1950s. Women created their own chapters within the early Mexican American organizations including LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, with their own agendas. At the height of the Chicano Movement, *Las Hijas de Cuatemoc* established an "explicitly feminist Chicana political" organization aimed to address the rejection of women leadership and the

marginalization of women's issues within *el Movimiento* (Blackwell, 2016, p. 6).

Even though women's rights movements are major strands in the social studies standards for US history in Texas high schools, the writers of the standards did not include any these people, organizations, or movements in the curriculum. Leaving the influences and actions of Mexican American women activists off the pages of US History robs Mexicana students of the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the history of their nation. Both the field of Borderlands history and the curriculum in US history classrooms must take seriously the narratives of Chicana activists.

Implications

Historians Hämäläinen and Truett's (2011) essay titled "On Borderlands," states, "if frontiers were the places where we once told our master American narratives, then borderlands are the places where those narratives come unraveled" (p. 338). Learning the history of the United States from the perspectives of the Mexicanos living in the borderlands and whose experiences, straddling two nations while celebrating their own culture, creating and contesting new identities, and influencing the social and political space around them, reveals a more genuine story of America. Critically studying US history from these vantage points uncovers the racializing process for people of Mexican origin and why some Americans still consider Mexican Americans today as "deportable, diseased, [and] dependent" (Molina, 2014, p. 139). Moving these perspectives to the center of the American experience also shed light on how people

create the spaces they inhabit. Spaces do not just statically exist (Perales, 2010). Through social and political interactions, daily practices, and decisions on how to deal with the forces from within and outside their spaces, Mexicanos developed the American Southwest, ergo America. History cannot erase the continued presence, influence, and movement in and out the American Southwest borderlands by people of Mexican origin, who according to Anzaldúa (1987) in her seminal work, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, “are neither *hispana india negra española ni gabacho, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps . . . not knowing which side to turn to, run from” (p. 216). Nor can history attempt to tell the story of the development of this nation without including their histories.

Feeling the pressure from Mexican American scholars, activists, and students, the Texas State Board of Education recently approved a new elective course, Mexican American Studies (MAS). In the most recent Texas state legislative session, a few bills circulated that aimed to require all school districts to offer the course and to make a MAS credit count toward a Social Studies credit and not as an elective. While this news represents a nod toward progress in a historically conservatively-led state, it still will not change the narrative taught in US history classrooms. Indeed, in the fall of 2021, the Texas governor signed into law an education bill designed to restrict the teaching of anything that disrupts the long-held patriotic narrative of US history. Allowing the master narrative of American history to persist guarantees a continuation

of white supremacy in the United States, where a reaction to eleven-year-old, San Antonio born, mariachi star, Sebastien de la Cruz, dressed with pride in his traje de charro, and passionately singing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” is to “express outrage” on Twitter by “calling him a ‘wetback,’ ‘beaner,’ and ‘illegal’ with the hashtags #yournotamerican and #gohome” (Barraclough, 2019, p. 1).

This attempted erasure is a modern day effort of white colonizers to continue the extinction project began by their ancestors in eliminating non-white people from the land. Learning only this narrative ensures the dominant group’s view of all people of Mexican origin, who encourage the continuation and celebration of Mexican culture and who demand a voice and representation in all aspects of life in the country, as a threat to their power. For those people in power the only answer to this threat and to the continual immigration from the South is additional militarization of the border and the collecting of shoelaces. Focusing on the history of the American Southwest from the perspectives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans who both crossed the border and were crossed by the border presents an opportunity to trouble the master narrative of US history and end the othering of Mexicanos living in the borderlands.

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