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**Becoming American: Immigration in Historical Perspective**

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**The Mexican-American Experience: From 1200 BC Olmec Civilization, to 2018 AD Paying for the Border Wall**

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Bibliography

John Higham, “The Amplitude of Ethnic History” in Nancy Foner and George M. Frederickson (eds.) Not Just Black and White

George J. Sanchez: Becoming Mexican-American; Race and Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900 – 1945. Oxford University Press. 1993, 367 pgs.

**Executive Summary**: the Introduction summarizes Mexican culture/ethnicity in historical perspective, and analyzes it in the context of John Higham’s *Tiered Hierarchy of Ethnic Groups[[1]](#endnote-1).* Mexican society recognizes its “mother culture” as that established by the Olmecs, from 1200 – 300 BC, a culture that gave rise to Moctezuma’s Aztec Empire (the great city of Tenochtitlán, now Mexico City, in the 16th Century). With the arrival of Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortes, an analog “settler” (from Higham’s 3-tiered hierarchy of ethnic groups: settler, captive, immigrant), upon Moctezuma’s surrender to Cortes on Aug 13, 1521, Mexico is “westernized” into the Spanish Empire. Mexico City becomes the seat of Spain’s imperial envoy – the Vice-royalty of New Spain, eventually governing the vast territories extending from what is now the Canadian-US border to the Panama-Colombia border, which remains Spanish territory until Mexico’s independence in 1821. The Mexican-American War of the late 1840’s results in Mexico’s North Territories shifting into USA’s “manifest destiny” of continuous continental dominance from sea to shining sea. That ceding of territory turns a large segment of Mexican population into a dispossessed “captive” ethnic group (again, drawing from Higham’s hierarchical model). A brisk economic upheaval during the “Porfiriato”, as Porfirio Diaz’ 1876-1911 dictatorship is called, ensured that Mexican laborers were readily accessible by the U.S. employers, labeling Mexicans as “immigrants” onto lands that were once Mexican. Social turmoil ensured that tensions between Anglo-Saxon USA and Mexican-American (Chicano) USA has been a constant theme since the 1950’s, and is now exacerbated by Trump policies toward immigrants in general, and Mexican immigrants specifically.

The inextinguishable light in this dark cave is offered by Mexican-American (Chicano) culture, examples of acclaimed writers and cultural guardians are Montserrat Fontes – *Dreams of the Centaur: A Novel*, and Rudolfo Anaya – *Bless me, Ultima*.

**“Mr Gorbachev: Tear down this wall!”**

 ***President Ronald Reagan, June 12, 1987*[[2]](#endnote-2)**

**“Who is gonna (sic) pay for the Wall?”**

 ***President Donald Trump, January 8, 2016*[[3]](#endnote-3)**

1. **Introduction**

The words of U.S. Presidents can have a tremendous impact on world events. History has borne out that President Ronald Reagan’s Berlin speech did in fact anticipate the crumbling of the Soviet Union’s hold on East Germany, and even precipitated the eventual downfall of the Soviet empire. It is undeniable that with the fall of the Soviet Union, immigration patterns throughout the entire world have changed for the better, as citizens of the former “Iron Curtain” countries of the Warsaw Pact emerged into the sunlight of free travel and emigration opportunity, suddenly without the risk of being persecuted by secret state security forces for “treasonous activities”.

Donald Trump’s words, on the other hand, have presaged a grand farce of insulting and demeaning proportion. Not only did Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto say that the Trump affront was an egregious insult to a NAFTA partner, he made clear to the world in an official, formal pronouncement that “Mexico will not pay for Donald Trump's border wall”[[4]](#endnote-4). Donald Trump himself has secretly resorted to alternative options to fund this anti-immigrant “Wall” by attempting to subvert the U.S. Congress for diverting funds appropriated for Department of Defense budget into a slush fund for border construction activities[[5]](#endnote-5).

And what do we know about our neighbor to the South, our NAFTA partner, the country that is demanding respect from our newly elected President Donald John Trump, a.k.a. “45”?

When Mexicans think about their ethnic origins, they can either reach back three thousand years to 1200 BC - the Olmec culture, or trace their Spanish lineage starting in the mid-sixteenth century, as the case may be. The Spanish foundations are well known and thoroughly documented, so for now, more about the Olmec “mother civilization” to Mesoamerica.

While the origins of the Olmec civilization are murky because no records have survived (they may have had books, as did the Aztecs that came later, but tropical climate ravages all that is organic), the Olmecs grew and thrived at the crossroads of ancient Mesoamerican trade routes, in a region known today as the Mexican districts of Tabasco and Veracruz.

One of the reasons why Mexicans can be so proud of their Olmec heritage is because it is considered by anthropologists to be a “pristine” civilization – in other words, one of the six pre-historic cultures that developed on its own without any migration or influence from some other civilization[[6]](#endnote-6).

What little remains of the Olmec culture consists of stone carvings, ruined cities and a handful of wooden artifacts. The stone carvings, however, are portentous vestiges of architectural shrewdness, and they range from massive heads that may have served to mark important boundaries, to complex stone troughs used for expansive irrigation systems.

Their deities are also depicted in stone carvings, and anthropologists have traced the lineage of the later Mesoamerican Aztec and Mayan deities to the ancient Olmec religion. One clear example is the feathered serpent, called Quetzalcoatl among the Aztecs, Kukulkan among the Yucatec Maya, and Q'uq'umatz and Tohil among the K'iche' Maya. Olmecs were extremely talented artists and sculptors: they produced many statues, masks, figurines, stelae, thrones and more. They are best known for their massive colossal heads, seventeen of which have been found at four different archaeological sites.

A Feathered Serpent from deep in the Juxtlahuaca cave. Stylistically tied to the Olmec, this red Feathered Serpent has a crest of now-faded green feathers. Courtesy of Matt Lachniet,

The Olmec peoples scattered and disappeared toward the third century BC, as the sister-culture of the Aztecs gained prominence throughout a large expanse centered on what is now Mexico City. This later Aztec civilization was destined to confront the challenge of conquest that Spanish explorer-conquistador Hernan Cortes brought to the New World.

Before discussing the transformation that Cortes affected upon the Aztecs, however, consider how this cultural foundation of Olmec – Aztec ancestry is in fact the *mythic origin* that John Higham describes as prerequisite for ethnicity. Ethnicity is that uniquely important human trait that Higham uses to track societal ebbs and flows, the underlying cause for economic, political and social clashes and alliances of peoples throughout history. For Higham it is not a white vs. brown vs. yellow vs. black vs. red world, but rather an Anglo-Saxon vs. Irish vs. Slavic vs. African vs. Arab vs. Mandarin, etc. world. John Higham has, through measured research of the causes and effects of the immigration phenomenon, proven that race is too dull a tool to carve a useful representation of America’s immigration history.

Race is all about large groupings, pliable geographic boundaries, and generalized physical traits of the human body writ large. Higham deftly invites us to employ another yardstick, so to speak, to analyze and better understand the many disparate and disjointed flows of immigrants into the USA.

This lens of ethnicity provides the serious student of immigration dynamics with a much-needed finer chisel to work with, in that it “grants greater agency in defining (a) collective identity”. The basic components of ethnicity are, according to Higham, language, culture, religion, and an ethnic memory consisting of a mythic sense of origin.

Higham’s molding of the concept of ethnic identity into the American (United States of America) origins calls for an intellectual leap, one that requires acceptance of the concept of
“initial image of New World identities” among the first English settlers that colonized what became New England. In other words, we must be able to view these settlers as a new ethnic grouping. Had Higham applied this logic to immigration in 16th century Mexico, a parallel construct would have emerged, in that the Spanish *Conquistadors* would qualify as settlers in a New World, thus creating a new identity with its own mythic origin – in this case the Cortes-Moctezuma victor/vanquished narrative.

For the native Aztecs, however, the narrative would unfortunately be one of captivity and subjugation first (Higham’s *captive* category of immigrant), and although a guarded fusion of cultures did also occur as the reinforcements from Spain became the dominant force throughout the land, the Spanish imperial caste system of *mestizaje* (mixed-race hierarchies) remained codified law, albeit with multiple and constantly evolving modifications, up until Mexico’s independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century.

One of Cortes’ keys to success in taking control of the Aztec kingdom was his immediate alliance with native tribes in the Tabasco coastal area when he arrived onto Aztec mainland from Cuba. He was given twenty slave women by a Tabasco tribal chieftain, and from among these women Cortes in fact took on “La Malinche”, also known as Doña Maria, as an indispensable interpreter. As their relationship deepened in cohabitation, she had a child with Cortes, who he named Martin. The system of *mestizaje* in Mexicotherefore immediately reached the highest stratum of power, and Martin, Cortes’ first-born, was inherently recognized as the son of a Spanish conquistador (Cortes was to become the Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca – his son Martin a potential heir to this title), and he was legitimized in 1529 by a bull of Pope Clement VII.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In Cortes’ own words, according to Rodríguez de Ocaña, one of Cortes’ Captains -an eye witness in the truest sense of the word- after God, Marina was the main reason for his success.

Spain was, throughout the sixteenth century, the protector of the Holy See, and Emperor Charles V of Germany, I of Spain, was proud to have his troops pave the way for Catholic evangelists who, driven by the powerful Archbishop of Toledo (who also served as the Grand Inquisitor) ensured that this process of *mestizaje* could only be legitimized when Aztecs and other less influential or powerful indigenous tribes that inter-married with Spaniards accepted Christianity.

These two ethnic groups, Aztec and Spanish, would eventually produce into modernity a third ethnic group: Mexican, an ethnicity that would not be seen as such until it emerged onto the global political stage with its rebellious emancipation from the Spanish empire in 1821.

Today Mexican society recognizes La Malinche as an important historical figure, in many ways even mythical, and often controversial. Historian Suzanne B. Pasztor, for example, found that Mexican feminists defended Malinche as a woman caught between cultures, forced to make complex decisions, who ultimately served as a mother of a new race[[8]](#endnote-8).

The Mexican independence from Spain came largely as a result of Napoleon’s 1810 invasion of Spain’s homeland, whereupon he installed his brother as the representative regent. The entire Spanish America, or Nueva España, became roiled with insurrection, as *criollos* (Spaniards born overseas of Spanish parents), mestizos (as explained, children of Spaniards with Indigenous people), and indigenous people themselves rose up in arms against the caste system and its inherently repressive distribution of wealth and political power. The Mexican War of Independence ended with the Treaty of Cordoba, and a Constitutional Monarchy was established by Agustin de Iturbide. But by the second year, the Republic challenge from Santa Anna and Guadalupe Victoria ousted Iturbide in 1823, giving rise to Mexico’s First Republic. With each shift in political leadership, the Mexicans’ inherited caste system weakened, but at the same time, the grip of governance turned lax, setting the stage for the devastating Mexican-American War of 1846-1848.

When the United States President Polk, who had run on a “Manifest Destiny” pro-annexation campaign made good on his promise and annexed the self-proclaimed Independent Republic of Texas in 1845, it was evident that Mexico’s Caudillo, Santa Anna, was not going to recognize the splintering-off of what had been up until then merely a rebellious Mexican province, the province of Tejas. As a matter of fact, it was Santa Anna himself who had lost the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, when he had been captured and held prisoner, and when he negotiated with the Texas freedom fighter, Sam Houston, and Interim Texas President Burnet for his own release by signing a Treaty, the Treaties of Velasco, on May 26, 1836[[9]](#endnote-9). Santa Anna was over the course of the next several years, to agree to grant a large measure of autonomy for the Independent Republic of Tejas, and on some accounts to even advocate for its complete independence from Mexico, as the Republic of Texas. Santa Anna as Caudillo of Mexico from 1841 to 1845, however, was not as sanguine about relinquishing domain over Tejas. Annexation by the United States of America meant a turning of tables, with recently arrived cattle rustlers, (known as *empresarios* by the Mexicans), from the USA gaining the upper hand over Mexican citizens who had been established in these lands for centuries.

There was another dynamic at hand, and that was the practice of slavery that the *empresarios* supported and employed in full measure, for which they remained in sympathy with the Southern states of the USA.

To counter the affront to Mexican governance, in 1830, Mexican President Anastasio Bustamante had outlawed American immigration to Texas, following several conflicts with the *empresarios* over the status of slavery in the region.

An apocryphal popular Mexican tale that depicts this Tejano – Empresario enmity I extracted from the memoirs of a Tejano-American who got this from an old-timer Tejano:

“The American cowboys would cross the Nueces River into the disputed south Texas grazing lands and steal cattle from their Mexican neighbors. He claimed that there had once been a battle in which a number of Texas Mexicans and some Anglo Texans had been killed or wounded. One of the casualties was apparently a young Texas Mexican who was fair-haired and light-skinned.

In the confusion of the skirmish, the Americans mistake him for one of their own, doctor him, and take him back home with them. But when they get home and the young man regains consciousness, he speaks only Spanish. The Americans realize that despite the fact that he doesn’t look Mexican, he is Mexican. And so I asked Boatright, ‘‘Well, what became of him?’’ I don’t know whether he knew or whether he just didn’t want to say, ‘‘Well, I don’t know what happened to him,’’ was his diplomatic reply. But of course he knew; they killed him. And that was the germ of this particular story.”

By 1846 it had become obvious that the military forces of a recently emancipated Republic of Mexico under Santa Anna were no match for the United States Army and the U.S. Navy. A much glorified amphibious invasion of Veracruz by the U.S. Marines paved the way for the fall and occupation of Mexico City. This blistering defeat would be forever remembered by Mexicans and recorded in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As described by historian John C. Davenport[[10]](#endnote-10):

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, forced onto the remnant Mexican government, ended the war and specified its major consequence, the Mexican Cession of the northern territories of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo México to the United States. The U.S. agreed to pay $15 million compensation for the physical damage of the war. In addition, the United States assumed $3.25 million of debt already owed earlier by the Mexican government to U.S. citizens. Mexico acknowledged the loss of their province, later the Republic of Texas (and now the State of Texas), and thereafter cited and acknowledged the Rio Grande as its future northern national border with the United States. Mexico had lost over one-third of its original territory from its 1821 independence.

From that point on, Mexico oriented its economic compass toward its Northern neighbor, and when Porfirio Diaz rose to power as Mexico’s quintessentially tyrannical autocratic dictator in 1876, the linkage to the USA was to become existential: Mexican laborers would serve as human capital (poorly paid, at that, but the prospects at home were tenuous at best), for the vast economic production engine that American captains of industry would construct in the newly acquired Mexican “Territorios del Norte”, i.e. the states of California, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

Perhaps one of the main features of the Diaz linkage to U.S. investment was the unconditional invitation he extended to the American Railroad moguls to upgrade, and practically take control of the Mexican railway. This vastly improved transportation infrastructure was to serve as the conveyor-belt, so to speak, to deliver powerful, and incredibly inexpensive labor for U.S. mining, construction, farming, ranching, foresting and manufacturing across the vast territories that had merely 30 years earlier (the span of one human generation) been under Mexican authority.

For all intents and purposes, persons who continued to inhabit those lands became second class citizens, and in many instances were dispossessed of land, mines, cattle, and factories as a result of their failure to accept new regulations and pay the onerous taxes that were imposed by the new U.S. authorities, taxes and regulations that these Spanish-speaking persons were unable to understand.

A landmark work describing the plight of this new Mexican-American generation of dislocated peoples is contained in the award-winning book by George J. Sanchez: Becoming Mexican-American; Race and Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900 – 1945. His work is detailed and thoroughly researched, and for the sake of conveying its core findings, I provide them abbreviated in caption format.

* By 1900, nearly ONE and a Half Million Mexicans (a TENTH of the population) had emigrated to USA, disrupting the Mexican economy even further
* Early 1900’s vast expanses of irrigated farmlands were built in the Southwest; mining in AZ, CO, OK and CA; curtailment of Euro & Asian immigration = MORE Mexican immigrants
* USA – Mexico railways\* = labor shuttles into San Antonio – New Orleans, El Paso, Tucson, and San Diego – Los Angeles
* Major disruption (small farmers, muleteers, millers, craftsmen disappeared to industrial farming, railways, food processing factories, manufacturing) = AMERICANIZATION of the 19th century Mexican society, **Porfirio Diaz’ vision**
* El Paso, 1910: “Just give your name and where you were going.” Inspectors were only concerned about Chinese and LPC’s (*Likely to Become a Public Charge*)
* All about remittances – mostly male laborers, traded through Labor Agencies
* By 1917 bathing/de-lousing/vaccination was implemented by Public Health Svc.
* Immigration Act of 1917 = Head Tax = Spike in Illegal Immigration and NO Return
* Los Angeles as Hub – by 1930’s MOST Mexican Settlers into LA had been in USA for over 5 years, and RE-settled into LA from working in Texas
* Los Angeles was a haven for Anglo-Saxons into CA: West=Anglo / East=Mex-tex

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* The GOAL is to one day reincorporate bi-lingual, highly skilled Mexican Americans into Mexico to produce a level of superior life\*
* Americanization programs were designed to transform the values of Mexican immigrant, and Mexicans, like Europeans, were seen as assimilable, unlike Asia’s Chinese and Japanese immigrants
* By 1929 LA surpassed all other western cities in manufacturing = population boom, and male laborers were Americanized through their workplace
* In 1920’s-30’s women immigrants in CA were Americanized through Home Teachers
* Replace Mexican diet – “*a child’s lunch of a folded tortilla could lead to crime*” with balanced diet conducive to well-behaved, constructive citizenry
* Mexican children segregated through IQ testing in English
* Funding for Americanization programs vanished in the 1930’s / Renewed Mexican Ident
* LA hit by Great Depression in 1930 = Movement to REPATRIATE Mexicans, Consul Rafael de la Colina / by the Trainload – 150,000 “Angelinos” in the early 1930’s
* In the 40’s, LA MexicanAmerican “Chicanos” acclimated & saw themselves as American citizens but preserved their “Mexican Soul” through customs, language, religion and a deeply rooted love of their native land.

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* Single male migrants initiated most Mexican migration, and were thus more likely to return to Mexico with funds to marry and settle
* When marriage occurred in the U.S., ties to the families of origin became secondary
* Mexican women migrating to the U.S. were generally confined within Mexican family
* In 20’s & 30’s LA, abundance of marriage partner possibilities: from different Mexican locales, American-born Chicanos, other immigrant groups, Anglo-LA (more rarely, usually immigrants from Mexico City).
* Mexicans were traditionally Catholic (Spanish tradition), but during Porfiriato Protestant sects, to include Methodist, Presbyterian and Mormon, were “imported” to foster Protestant “work ethic”
* CCD – Confraternity of Christian Doctrine became important, imparting “American” Catholicism, instructed in Spanish, to large Chicano communities in American “barrios”
* Music “mass-culture” emerged for Chicano community, and radio producers filled dead air time to cater to Chicano audiences
* New 1930’s Chicanos experienced the “dance craze”, shunned by parents – this contrasted with life in Mexico, where the youth had few outlets for juvenile expression
* Vast majority of Mexican immigrants did not leave the working class, yet cultural adaptation did occur – adoption of “Tough Pride” to deal with grueling work
* A “white collar” musician class emerged to deliver Chicano music throughout LA
* In late 30’s and 40’s wives and older children often became sources of supplemental income, and further, deeper integration into American society

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* “We’re not awakening ourselves for Mexico nor the United States, but for ourselves”. Paul Colonel, President of the Mexican American Movement (MAM) 1938-39
* Thousands of Mexican immigrants were stranded in LA without jobs in the 30’s Great Depression, and opted to repatriate
* Those who didn’t became victims of new campaigns to “rid society of Mexicans to recapture American jobs”
* By 1933, One Third of the U.S. workforce was unemployed = 15 MILLION workers
* Vast majority of Mexican Immigrants at low-end of workforce who remained in the U.S. were unemployed and forced to rely on welfare and charitable organizations
* “Mexico llama a sus hijos” = recapture its workforce with new industrial skills
* But repatriation did not work in many cases because of lack of factories/infrastructure
* “Union de Repatriados Mexicanos” urged the Mexican government to halt the program until the promises of livelihood could be met
* Meanwhile, in LA, workers joined Unions to press for workers’ rights, and leaders emerged: Armando Florez for agricultural workers as Chairman of the 1933 El Monte Berry Strike Committee, a strike that succeeded when it eventually engulfed Santa Monica, Culver City, and Orange County
* Union solidarity cracked the mold of racism that depressed Chicano wages, when in the late 30’s, vocal Mexican American leaders in CIO-affiliated Union Locals in LA fought for integrated Labor workforce, gaining important wage-guarantee concessions
* Ambivalence and resentment reigned in the 40’s (Zoot-suit Riots!) as WW-II conscription leveled-out the American youth - Anglo, Mexican, Black, Asian, or Jewish

The social turmoil continued to rage-on, and only occasionally abate throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, and this is the subject of the next section.

1. **A closer look at the fissure-to-chasm transformation**

In this section I showcase several well-researched, scholarly articles written by Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, for the most part (some are editorials, products of team-work, so it is hard to qualify Chicano authorship). I have assessed these narratives to be genuine mirrors of the Mexican-American immigrant plight, and cannot aspire to improve on them without resource to deal directly with the Chicano population at their place of work, play, and residence.

Excerpts from The Conversation - How crossing the US-Mexico border became a crime, April 30, 2017, by Kelly Lytle Hernandez, Associate Professor, History and African-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

It was not always a crime to enter the United States without authorization.

In fact, for most of American history, immigrants could enter the United States without official permission and not fear criminal prosecution by the federal government.

That changed in 1929. On its surface, Congress’ new prohibitions on informal border crossings simply modernized the U.S. immigration system by compelling all immigrants to apply for entry.

Blease’s law: Senator Coleman Livingston Blease hailed from the hills of South Carolina. In 1925, he entered Congress committed, above all else, to protecting white supremacy. In 1929, as restrictionists and employers tussled over the future of Mexican immigration, Blease proposed a way forward.

According to U.S. immigration officials, Mexicans made nearly one million official border crossings into the United States during the 1920s. They arrived at a port of entry, paid an entry fee and submitted to any required tests, such as literacy and health.

However, as U.S. immigration authorities reported, many other Mexican immigrants did not register for legal entry. Entry fees were prohibitively high for many Mexican workers. Moreover, U.S. authorities subjected Mexican immigrants, in particular, to kerosene baths and humiliating delousing procedures because they believed Mexican immigrants carried disease and filth on their bodies. Instead of traveling to a port of entry, many Mexicans informally crossed the border at will, as both U.S. and Mexican citizens had done for decades.

With few exceptions, prosecutions for unlawful entry and reentry remained low until 2005. As a measure of the war on terror, the George W. Bush administration directed U.S. attorneys to adopt an “enforcement with consequences” strategy. In 2009, U.S. attorneys prosecuted more than 50,000 cases of unlawful entry or reentry. The Obama administration continued the surge, betting that aggressive border enforcement would help bring a recalcitrant Congress to adopt comprehensive immigration reform. It did not.

By 2015, prosecutions for unlawful entry and reentry accounted for 49 percent of all federal prosecutions and the federal government had spent at least US$7 billion to lock up unlawful border crossers.

Throughout this most recent surge, the disparate impact of criminalizing unlawful entry and reentry has endured. Today, Latinos, led by Mexicans and Central Americans, make up 92 percent of all immigrants imprisoned for unlawful entry and reentry.

Knowing this history is important now. On April 11, 2017, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced his plan to step up prosecutions of unlawful entries, saying it’s time to “restore a lawful system of immigration.” This may read like a colorblind commitment to law and order. But the law Sessions has vowed to enforce was designed with racist intent.

Attorney General Sessions still wants more. Traveling to southern Arizona to announce his plan to even more aggressively prosecute unlawful entry, he signaled that, in the years to come, most prosecutions will happen on the U.S.-Mexico border and will target [Mexicans and Central Americans](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/25/as-mexican-share-declined-u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population-fell-in-2015-below-recession-level/).

When the number of Mexicans as well as Central Americans imprisoned on immigration charges soon booms, there will be nothing unwitting or colorblind about it. Congress first invented the crimes of unlawful entry and reentry with the purpose of criminalizing and imprisoning Mexican immigrants and it has delivered on that intent since 1929. The Sessions plan will bear a similar result and, in the process, discharge the racist design of Blease’s law.

So once again, the Government of the United States of America, now Donald Trump’s instrument of power (a Donald Trump who, according to a recent August 16, 2018 Opinion Editorial by John Brennan, ex-Director of the CIA, in the New York Times newspaper, cannot be taken at his word[[11]](#endnote-11), and who, according to 2016 Presidential Candidate Hillary R. Clinton, is a “Russian puppet”), is in turn representing an extreme right-wing faction of the Republican oligarchy, one that is amazingly constituted by grifters[[12]](#endnote-12) and mercenary *nouveau* politicos whose time has come to exploit the U.S. Treasury), has unleashed the attack-dogs of nativism. There is absolutely no difference between the articulations that Senator Coleman Blease bull-horned back in the 1920’s from his lofty perch as a U.S. Senator in order to gain the votes of underprivileged bigoted American whites, and the rhetoric used by President Donald Trump to capture and ensnare that same body politic in order to use it as malleable raw political power. On September 5, 2017, President Trump ordered an end to the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This program shields some young undocumented immigrants —who often arrived at a very young age in circumstances beyond their control—from deportation. In 2012, President Obama issued the DACA executive order after the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act did not pass in Congress several times. The young people impacted by DACA and the DREAMAct are often referred to as “DREAMers.”

In making the announcement, Attorney General Sessions announced that the Trump Administration was ending the DACA program. Here are some of these Trump-Sessions pronouncements that have already shoe-horned their way into historical record:

“The situation at our Southwest Border is unacceptable. Congress has failed to pass effective legislation that serves the national interest—that closes dangerous loopholes and fully funds a wall along our southern border. As a result, a crisis has erupted at our Southwest Border that necessitates an escalated effort to prosecute those who choose to illegally cross our border,” said Attorney General Jeff Sessions. “To those who wish to challenge the Trump Administration’s commitment to public safety, national security, and the rule of law, I warn you: illegally entering this country will not be rewarded, but will instead be met with the full prosecutorial powers of the Department of Justice. To the Department’s prosecutors, I urge you: promoting and enforcing the rule of law is vital to protecting a nation, its borders, and its citizens. You play a critical part in fulfilling these goals, and I thank you for your continued efforts in seeing to it that our laws—and as a result, our nation—are respected.”

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Justice News, U.S. Department of Justice, April 6, 2018

Trump on Mexico: “They are not our friend, believe me,” he said, before disparaging Mexican immigrants: “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

Campaign speech, Tucson, AZ 2016.

“We have people coming into the country or trying to come in, we're stopping a lot of them, but we're taking people out of the country. You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals."

Trump, May 15, 2017 White House meeting with a staged CA anti-immigrant forum.

To portray precisely what the view is from the Mexican-American immigrant laborer’s point of view, I have selected this article from the Harvard Magazine editorial staff.

Uneasy Neighbors: A Brief History of Mexican-U.S. Migration, Harvard Magazine [May-June 2007](https://harvardmagazine.com/2007/05) Main Article: [End of the Melting Pot?](https://harvardmagazine.com/node/1354)

The recent political sparring over immigration reform has included scant mention of cross-border diplomacy. Despite the growing interdependence of the U.S. and Mexican economies over the past few decades, the governments of the two nations have shown little interest in cooperating on the thorny issue of human migration. A brief look at the history of the Mexican-U.S. labor relationship reveals a pattern of mutual economic opportunism, with only rare moments of political negotiation.

The first significant wave of Mexican workers coming into the United States began in the early years of the twentieth century, following the curtailment of Japanese immigration in 1907 and the consequent drying up of cheap Asian labor. The need for Mexican labor increased sharply when the Unites States entered World War I. The Mexican government agreed to export Mexican workers as contract laborers to enable American workers to fight overseas. After the war, an intensifying nativist climate led to restrictive quotas on immigration from Europe and to the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol, aimed at cutting back the flow of Mexicans. But economic demand for unskilled migrant workers continued throughout the Roaring Twenties, encouraging Mexican immigrants to cross the border—legally or not.

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| http://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/050x0507_01b.jpgA 43-year-old migrant worker picking strawberries in Florida, 1997. Migrants have long called strawberries *frutas del diablo* (fruits of the devil) because picking them ranks among the lowest-paid, most labor-intensive types of farm work. |
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The Depression brought a temporary halt to the flow of Mexican labor. During the early 1930s, Mexican workers—including many legal residents—were rounded up and deported en-masse by federal authorities in cooperation with state and local officials. Mexicans became the convenient scapegoats for widespread joblessness and budget shortages; as Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone point out in [*Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*](http://www.powells.com/partner/30264/biblio/9780871545909)(2002), Mexicans were accused, paradoxically, of both “taking away jobs from Americans” and “living off public relief.”

The demand for Mexican immigrants reemerged after Pearl Harbor, when the U.S. government sought an agreement with Mexico to import large numbers of Mexican farm laborers. Known as braceros, these workers would ensure the continued production of the U.S. food supply during the war years. “It was Mexicans and Rosie the Riveter who ran the American economy and enabled American citizens to go to war,” explains vice provost for international affairs Jorge Domínguez, Madero professor of Mexican and Latin American politics and economics.

Although intended as a wartime arrangement, the Bracero program continued under pressure from U.S. growers, who feared a continued labor shortage in the booming postwar economy. Still, the numbers of legal braceros fell short of demand, and growers began regularly recruiting undocumented workers to tend their fields. By the end of the Korean War, illegal immigration had become a fixture of the U.S. agricultural economy—and public sentiment had again turned restrictionist. In 1954, the U.S. government responded with “Operation Wetback,” apprehending close to one million illegal workers. Meanwhile, to appease the growers, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reprocessed many of these undocumented Mexicans and returned them to the fields as legal braceros.

In the early 1960s, with the advent of the civil-rights movement, public opinion began to view the Bracero system as exploitative and detrimental to the socioeconomic condition of Mexican Americans. The government ended the program in 1964. But growers were still hooked. “The problem of Mexican illegal immigration is born at the moment that the Bracero program ends,” Domínguez explains. “[Mexicans] keep coming, because the demand is still there.”

Following the Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act of 1965, which removed the racially based quotas on immigration set up in the 1920s, Mexicans for the first time had to compete for visas with immigrants from other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean. Rapid population growth and declining economic conditions in Mexico coincided with a reduction in the legal cap on Mexican immigration beginning in 1968, causing the numbers of undocumented workers to soar.

As the problem of illegal immigration worsened through the recession-plagued 1970s, the prospect of diplomatic talks between Mexico and the United States grew less likely. The Mexican government saw little to gain from cross-border negotiations at a time when restrictionist voices in the United States were gaining ground. As Domínguez explains, “[The Mexican government] realized they had a stake in Mexicans going abroad, exporting the underemployment problem.” They also feared that any discussion with the United States would involve “linkage”—that is, that the United States would tie trade concessions to Mexico’s improved control of the border. This pattern of political avoidance continued into the 1980s. In 1986, when the United States passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), “there was no Mexican government voice in the process,” Domínguez points out.

The passage of the IRCA set the stage, many observers believe, for the enormous and entrenched problem of undocumented immigrants that exists today. While granting amnesty to 2.3 million Mexicans residing illegally in the United States, the law began a process of border fortification and militarization that has had the opposite of its intended effect. The idea of building a wall—which began under the Clinton administration—turned a pattern of circular migration into one of permanent settlement. “Now ‘Once I make it, I’m not going back,’” Domínguez explains. As Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey pointed out to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2005: “From 1965 to 1985, 85 percent of undocumented entries from Mexico were offset by departures and the net increase in the undocumented population was small. The build-up of enforcement resources at the border has not decreased the entry of migrants so much as discouraged their return home.”

Ironically, while the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 heralded a new level of economic integration between Mexico and the United States, the question of labor migration remained off the table. “Even as binational trade with Mexico grew by a factor of eight from 1986 to the present,” Massey points out, “the Border Patrol’s enforcement budget has increased by a factor of 10 and the number of officers tripled. The U.S. Border Patrol is now the largest arms-bearing branch of the U.S. government save the military itself, with an annual budget of $1.4 billion.”

In 2000, a year in which both countries elected new presidents, Mexico finally took the initiative to launch discussions on immigration. President George W. Bush seemed open to a policy along the lines of the Bracero agreement. “But the Mexicans overreached,” Domínguez explains. “They wanted to deal with everything, including the status of Mexicans already here.” The United States said no, and after 9/11, the Bush administration lost interest.

The recent stalemate in the U.S. debate on immigration reform has stalled the possibility of diplomatic talks with Mexico, at least for now. The United States may have to resolve its internal contradictions on the subject of Mexican labor before any substantive cooperation with the Mexican government can take place.

Finally, it cannot go without stating that as neighbors we, the USA and Mexico, with the USA in the lead due to our privileged position as one of the wealthiest nations on the face of the Earth, must work hard, as empathetic, conscientious human beings, to arrive at a permanent solution to avoid the kind of tragedy that Jorge Ramos, Mexican-born Univision journalist-anchorman who has interviewed all U.S. Presidents since H.W. Bush to Trump (who scoffed at Ramos). He is considered by peers to be among the most influential Hispanic journalists on the American continent.

Dying to Cross - The Worst Immigrant Tragedy in American History. Jorge Ramos, Harper Collins, April 2005.

On May 14, 2003, a familiar risk-filled journey, taken by hopeful Mexican immigrants attempting to illegally cross into the United States, took a tragic turn. Inside a sweltering truck abandoned in Texas, authorities found at least 74 people packed into a "human heap of desperation." After months of investigation, a 25-year-old Honduran-born woman named Karla Chavez was found responsible for leading the human trafficking cell that led to this grisly tragedy in which 19 people died.

Through interviews with survivors who had the courage to share their stories and conversations with the victims' families, and in examining the political implications of the incident for both U.S. and Mexican immigration policies, Jorge Ramos tells the story of one of the most heartbreaking episodes of our nation's turbulent history of immigration.

Here is the devastating narrative of “the final hour” that describes these 74 immigrant’s plight during the last interminable hour that they lived locked inside of the trailer death-trap.

The Final Hour

Just after about three hours on the road, the passengers finally began to feel the air conditioning system kick in. Some of the survivors say that they felt “a bit of air” waft across their overheated bodies. Doris, the Honduran immigrant, felt it. But the remedy had arrived too late. A person suffering from hyperthermia and a body temperature of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit will not be able to recover with air conditioning alone. A high body temperature, for one thing, will not go down on its own for several hours. Ant time was precisely what these people lacked: it was running out with every breath they took.

After four hours on the road, the truck suddenly came to a halt. For the first time, it came to a full and complete stop. Driving along U.S. Highway 77, driver Tyrone Williams had cruised past Robstown, Refugio, and McFaddin, butt as he approached Victoria, Texas, he apparently noticed that one of his tail lights was dangling. Up ahead he saw a gas station on the side of the road and pulled over. It was the Hilltop Exxon Truck Stop.

As soon as he stepped down from the truck to examine the tail lights, Williams heard people shouting and banging from inside the truck container.

Four hours after departing from Harlingen, Texas, the driver pulled a lever and opened the truck container’s two doors.

“The two doors opened,” Alberto (a survivor) remembers. “People fell down. I felt a little weak, and said to myself, ‘I think I’m going to stay here a little bit.’ But then I got scared that they were going to close the doors again. There were a lot of people on the floor.”

Tyrone Williams suddenly found himself staring at several people in fetal position; that was when he first realized something was very, very wrong. He kept hearing a woman cry out, over and over again.

A very frightened Williams, according to his own statements to investigators, disengaged the driver’s cab from the truck bed and fled the scene with Fatima Holloway (his travel companion). The trailer was left abandoned on the side of the road, as were the people in it.

1. **Emergent Successes**

Can an ethnic group exist without ownership of a strong culture? According to Jean and John Camoroff[[13]](#endnote-13), ethnic groups differ from other social groups, such as subcultures, interest groups or social classes, because they emerge and change over historical periods (centuries) in a process known as ethnogenesis, a period of several generations of endogamy resulting in common ancestry (which is then sometimes cast in terms of a mythological narrative of a founding figure).

Ethnic identity is reinforced by reference to "boundary markers" - characteristics said to be unique to the group that sets it apart from other groups. One of the principal distinguishing characteristics is culture, i.e. that which is comprised of a narrative (written or spoken) of historical provenance, a distinguishing language or dialect, art, dress, and music being the more salient attributes of cultural ethnicity.

The stories of the people need to be told as they unfold, and research into both painful, and triumphant experiences of the past must be narrated artfully, and then widely disseminated throughout the community (a community of shared values) to become integral parts of the ethnic existential fabric of being.

Here are two such writers, bards of their Chicano communities: Montserrat Fontes (Dreams of the Centaur: A Novel), and Rudolfo Anaya – *Bless me, Ultima*.

Montserrat Fontes was born in Laredo, Texas, raised in Los Angeles, California. She holds a 1966 B.A., English, and a '67 M.A., English. Montserrat Fontes is a distinguished writer whose first novel, First Confession (Norton: 1991), has been widely praised as a major contribution to Chicana fiction. Her work is often taught in the CSLA U.S. Ethnic Literature course. Her second novel, Dreams of the Centaur, was released in 1996 and after winning the American Book Award, has been translated into German and French.

Fontes has served the community as an educator; after 21 years of service at University High School, she has recently joined the faculty at Marshall High School where she teaches advanced placement English and journalism.

She has received numerous endowments and grants, including honors for two National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars, a Carnegie-Mellon grant and a National Endowment for the Humanities independent study grant. Fontes has had four book reviews published in the Philadelphia Inquirer and has been a guest speaker for organizations, including the California Association of Teachers of English, the Journalism Education Association National Convention, and the University of California, Los Angeles Chancellor's Conference. She earned her master's degree in one year at CSLA.

Publications and Prizes

Books: Dreams of the Centaur (W. W. Norton & Company, 1996)

First Confession (W. W. Norton & Company, 1991)

High Contrast (Naiad Press, 1987)

Journals: Westways

Prizes Won:

American Book Award for Fiction, from the Before Columbus Foundation, Dreams of the Centaur, 1997, Chicago, Il. Distinguished Alumnus Award, School of Arts & Letters,“for dedicated service and for the civic pride demonstrated for the benefit of all citizens of LA County,” California State University, Los Angeles, March 19, 1996. Carnegie-Mellon Grant for “Stephen Daedalus, Hamlet, and Waiting for Godot,” 1988. National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar,“Versions of the Mexican Revolution,” Boston College, Boston, MA, 1990. National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar,“William Faulkner: The Regional and the Mythic, “ University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, 1987. National Endowment for the Humanities Independent Study Grant, “The Use of the Grotesque by Carson McCullers & Flannery O’Connor,” Milledgeville, GA 1985.

Montserrat describes her driving force: “I am a product of the border -- Texas and the USA. The conflicts that exist between these two nations war inside me and continue to create conflicts within me. They are also the greatest stimulus to my writing as they provide me with a dual vision: Mexican and American. This duality is visible in whatever I write and wherever I go”.

In Dreams of the Centaur, Montserrat Fontes “exposes the cruel history of the Porfirio Diaz deportation and enslavement of the Yaqui Indians of the Sonoran Desert at the turn of the twentieth century. The story focuses on Felipa and Alejo, the mother and son caught up in the saga of the times. Fontes writes a well-paced adventure story, revealing with honesty the suffering of the people. The novel reads like a Greek tragedy. Gripping to the end.” – Rudolfo Anaya

Dreams of the Centaur

Set in Mexico at the turn of the century, Fontes's fiercely lyrical second novel (after First Confession) tells of a Mexican family caught up in the Yaqui Indians' struggle against the ruthless dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz. Alejo Durcal is 16 years old when his father, self-made rancher Jose Durcal, is shot to death immediately after winning a friend's lands in a poker bet. Compelled by a code of vengeance and honor, Alejo kills his father's murderer, turns himself in--and is sentenced to 20 years in prison. There, he discovers that a fellow inmate, Charco, is his half-brother. At this point, the narrative shifts from third-person to Alejo's first-person, as he and Charco are granted permission to serve part of their sentence in the army, guarding Yaqui prisoners and delivering them into plantation slavery. Through Alejo's searing words, we witness the plight of the Yaqui, who suffer beatings, shootings, rapes and mass deportation from their homeland in Sonora to Yucatan. Alejo's strong, loving bond with his mother, Felipa, who rescues him on the battlefield and amputates his wounded leg, pervades the novel, while Felipa's running commentary on male machismo adds a feminist undercurrent. Fontes's grafting of an affecting coming-of-age story onto a grim depiction of a historical tragedy is powerful and noteworthy.

Rudolfo Anaya – Bless me, Ultima. “Probably the best known, and most respected contemporary Chicano fiction” - *The New York Times,* Summer, 1976

Rudolfo’s first book, written at night while he taught at an Albuquerque, New Mexico Public School. It was rejected repeatedly, but Rudolfo persisted in finding a small publisher in Berkley California, named Quinto Sol, interested in furthering the Chicano experience, and it was published in 1972. It gained immediate acclaim and won the Quinto Sol Literary Prize in 1971 for the Best Chicano Novel of the Year. Whether a marketing ploy, or a genuflection to a genuinely new slice of Americana – Chicano Literature - , Anaya went on to achieve national visibility at a time when Chicano power gained in ascendancy in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Yes, these were the North Territories that Mexico ceded to the United States as spoils for their crushing defeat in the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War, when Mexico was barely 25 years into its independence. It had taken that long for Mexican-American culture, Chicano culture, to reclaim its lofty rung on the totem of arts in Southwest USA.

In Rudolfo Anaya’s words:

**** [**Rudolfo Anaya**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8925.Rudolfo_Anaya)

 “It is because good is always stronger than evil. Always remember that, Antonio. The smallest bit of good can stand against all the powers of evil in the world and it will emerge triumphant.”
― [Rudolfo Anaya](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8925.Rudolfo_Anaya), [Bless Me, Ultima](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1828689)

“It seemed the more I knew about people the more I knew about the strange magic hidden in their hearts.”
― [Rudolfo Anaya](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8925.Rudolfo_Anaya), [Bless Me, Ultima](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1828689)

“A [real] man does not flee from truth”
― [Rudolfo Anaya](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8925.Rudolfo_Anaya), [Bless Me, Ultima](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1828689)

It’s as if Rudolfo knew that there were going to be two powerful men in the world today, both enormously impactful on the lives of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos: the President of the United States of America, and his Attorney General, who are, in my opinion, both in dire need of committing that statement to their conscience.

1. John Higham, “The Amplitude of Ethnic History” in Nancy Foner and George M. Frederickson (eds.) *Not Just Black and White*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ronald Reagan June 12, 1987 Speech in Berlin directed at the then Soviet Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev. Internet link: https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://i.ytimg.com/vi/xK30k2WTxY0/hqdefault.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.youtube.com/watch?v%3DxK30k2WTxY0&h=360&w=480&tbnid=oiSx4IeMcU7kBM:&q=reagan+tear+down+this+wall+speech&tbnh=160&tbnw=213&usg=AFrqEzfp4gJp5xVQreTQ8Cl32l8x4z90IQ&vet=12ahUKEwj4s-Py1fvcAhUliOAKHWZDB9wQ9QEwAHoECAoQBg..i&docid=rUEjxKt51c3xMM&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj4s-Py1fvcAhUliOAKHWZDB9wQ9QEwAHoECAoQBg [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Donald Trump, Presidential Candidate, addressed a crowd at a campaign rally, and challenged them to answer this question repeatedly. The crowd obsequiously repeats “MEXICO!” over and over, to Trump’s delight, who concludes – “I’ve actually never done that before… that was kinda cute.” Internet link: https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/trump-whos-gonna-pay-for-the-wall-598086723533?v=raila [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Enrique Peña Nieto concluded his televised announcement demanding respect from the United States of America. Internet link: https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/01/26/mexico-president-will-not-pay-for-wall-santiago-ctn.cnn [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Josh Dawsey and Mike DeBonis, Washington Post, March 27, 2018 – “Trump privately presses for military to pay for border wall.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Betty Jane Meggers,Prehistoric America: An Ecological Perspective, Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, 1972. The six pristine civilizations are: Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Mesoamerica, and Andean. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Asociación Española de Estudios Genealógicos y Heráldicos (1985). Estudios genealógicos y heráldicos, Volumen 1. p. 295 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Don M. Coerver; Suzanne B. Pasztor; Robert Buffington (2004). Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History. ABC-CLIO. pp. 200–. ISBN 978-1-57607-132-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See Texas State Library “The Treaties of Velasco” signed on May 14, 1836. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The U.S.-Mexico Border: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, John C. Davenport, P.48 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. John Brennan, Aug 16, 2018, New York Times Newspaper Opinion Editorial: “Mr. Trump’s claims of no collusion are, in a word, hogwash. The only questions that remain are whether the collusion that took place constituted criminally liable conspiracy, whether obstruction of justice occurred to cover up any collusion or conspiracy, and how many members of “Trump Incorporated” attempted to defraud the government by laundering and concealing the movement of money into their pockets”. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. New York Times Editorial Staff, June 6, 2018, “Grifters Gonna Grift”: “Mr. Mueller is uncovering all manner of questionable dealings — some of them illegal, others merely appalling.” [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Camoroff, John L. and Jean Camoroff 2009: Ethnicity Inc.. Chicago: Chicago Press [↑](#endnote-ref-13)