Life along the Border
A LANDMARK TEJANA THESIS

By Jovita González

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS
College Station
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Preface
was Limón who introduced González to a whole generation of scholars through his recovery and publication of two of her manuscripts: *Dew on the Thorn*, a book-length folklore study she wrote in the mid-1930s, published in 1997 by Arte Publico Press; and *Caballero*, a historical novel she coauthored with an Anglo woman, Margaret Eimer, in the late 1930s, published in 1996 by Texas A&M University Press. Both of these works have brought much-needed attention to this previously overlooked and underrated scholar and have helped to burnish her reputation as an astute observer of the Latina/o condition. I thank Dr. Limón for his efforts to enrich our collective knowledge of Jovita González’s work, and I hope that the present volume will contribute to our deepening understanding of both Jovita González and her generation.

—Maria Eugenia Cotera
University of Michigan

**PART I**

**Introduction**
because of their tenacity and persistency have risen above their class. Others are descendants of the old landed aristocracy. One thing is characteristic of all these men. They are politicians, and that is where the danger lies. Border politics are just emerging from political bossism and rings. If the League tends to educate the Mexican-Americans for purely altruistic reasons, its labor no doubt is meritorious and praiseworthy. But should county bossism be superseded by an organized state-wide political machine, the results will be detrimental not only to the Mexican-American citizens but to the state at large.

Dr. Weeks of the University of Texas is more optimistic on the subject and makes the following conclusion:

In conclusion, may it be said that educated Mexican-Americans in general as well as the members of the League of United Latin American Citizens, are agreed that the problem with which they and their racial brothers are faced in Texas and the United States have been created quite as much by their own deficiencies as by the deficiencies of the Anglo-American in his dealings with the two races and two civilizations. In order, therefore, that these people may be able to stand their ground, they must correct their own deficiencies, resulting from ignorance, docility, and prejudice against the Anglo-Saxon and his ways. And doing such, they must show him that they can meet his standards and hence can demand his rights. Thus, without sacrificing the best of their racial heritage, they can remove his racial prejudice.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{CHAPTER 6}

\textbf{What the Coming of the Americans Has Meant to the Border People}

The beginning of the century brought the Renaissance to the border counties. It was an awakening in every sense of the word, socially, politically, and economically. For nearly two hundred years the Texas-Mexicans had lived knowing very little and caring less of what was going on in the United States. They looked southward for all the necessities and pleasures in life. Mexican newspapers brought them news of the outside, their children were educated in Mexican schools, Spanish was the language of the people, Mexican currency was used altogether. When the women craved for finery, it was acquired across the river.

The counties in which these people lived were run by Mexicans, and everywhere, with the exception of Brownsville, the Americans were considered foreigners. These people had lived so long in their communities that it was home to them, and home to them meant Mexico. They lived happily ignorant that they were foreigners in a foreign land. As all provincial people, they considered themselves the elect of the community and looked down in disdain at the few Americans or Europeans who settled among them. The landed aris-
tocracy, impregnable in their racial pride, lived in a world of their own sincerely believing in their rural greatness.

The few American families living in these communities had to adapt themselves to the existing conditions of the element among which they lived, and had become, as has been previously stated, Mexicanized. They spoke Spanish, a few had become Catholic, and many had intermarried with the Texas-Mexican element. The children from these unions had not in any way assimilated the customs and habits of the American parent, but had remained untouched and thoroughly Mexican.

Rude then, was the awakening of these border people when the development of the Rio Grande Valley brought hundreds of foreigners to their doors. This invasion of fortune-seeking Americans was a material as well as a spiritual blow to the Mexicans, particularly to the landed aristocracy.

On the other hand, to the jornaleros or day laborers, this economic change improved their status in many respects. It meant more than a change of masters, it meant more work, better wages and improved living conditions. No class of society has gained as much by the economic changes as the jornalero class has. As previously stated, there has been a shifting of the day laborers from the ranches to the cities. And this has been a great step in the improvement of their condition.

However hard their work may be in the towns, it is not as heavy as what they had to do on the ranches, and the wages are much better. Whereas they had earned fifty cents a day as farmhands or goatherds, they are now making anywhere from one dollar to two dollars per day. The old one room jacal has been replaced by a small lumber house for which they are paying on the installment plan. The laborers themselves are better dressed, they wear store-bought clothes and their wives may attain their highest ambition, wearing a hat.

They work in the truck garden plantations, in the orange and lemon groves. In the spring and summer they migrate to the fields to chop or pick cotton as the case may be. During this season enough is earned by the whole family for the winter, should there be a scarcity of work. These people are content with their economic uplift and care very little or nothing as to the treatment they receive from their American masters. They do not resent any racial distinction or discrimination, the difference between them and their masters is no greater than that which separated them from their former amos.

The children of this class are doing something that their parents never accomplished; they are going to school, learning to read, to write, and to speak English. Altogether they are thoroughly satisfied with their lot.

Dissatisfaction, however, is rampant among the middle classes, composed of small shopkeepers and artisans. They read much, mostly in Spanish and they are the thinkers. It is from this group that the United League of Latin Americans gets its members. The laborers are too contented to want more, and the landowners are not interested in the League unless they can be the leaders. This middle class is receiving a public school education and the most ambitious of its members are working their way through institutions of high learning.

Economically both classes resent the invasion of the Americans. The introduction of new and improved methods, the chain stores, and Piggly Wiggly has driven the middle class grocers out of business. The same thing has happened with owners of dry goods stores, drug stores, etc.

It hurts the landowners’ pride to see these foreigners do in a short time what they had not been able to accomplish in years. They have seen the Americans appropriate all that had been theirs, even the desert plains. The new arrivals bought this seemingly worthless land at a very low price, and by irrigation and modern machinery have converted the desert into a garden. An undercurrent of dissatisfaction is felt all over the country amongst these two classes. In the towns they see themselves segregated into their own quarters as an inferior race.

The friendly feeling which had slowly developed between the old American and Mexican families has been replaced by a feeling of hate, distrust, and jealousy on the part of the Mexicans. The descendants of the Americans who married Mexican wives in the middle nineteenth century are more Mexicanized than the Mexicans themselves, and some are even ashamed of their American blood.

All over the border counties, with the exception of such towns as Laredo, Rio Grande City, and Brownsville, where the Mexican...
element predominates, a contest between the two elements is being waged. It is a racial struggle, a fight between an aggressive, conquering and material people and a passive, volatile, but easily satisfied race. It is the struggle between the New World and the Old, for the Texas-Mexicans have retained more than their brethren in Mexico Old World traditions, customs, and ideals. The old families resent the gulf with which the newly arrived Americans have separated them. Not that they are anxious for the friendship of the American families but they object to the fact that they are considered an inferior race. The word \textit{white}, which the Americans use to differentiate themselves from the Mexican population, is like a red flag to a bull.

In an interview which the writer had with a Roma citizen whose family had been in Texas for two hundred years the following was gathered:

“We, Texas-Mexicans of the border,” he said, “although we hold on to our traditions, and are proud of our race, are loyal to the United States, in spite of the treatment we receive by some of the new Americans. Before their arrival, there were no racial or social distinctions between us. Their children married ours, ours married theirs, and both were glad and proud of the fact. But since the coming of the ‘white trash’ from the north and middle west we felt the change. They made us feel for the first time that we were Mexicans and that they considered themselves our superiors.

“In spite of these things we showed our loyalty during the World War when we sent our sons to the front, and when those of us who were too old to serve in the army offered our services free of charge to the Draughting Board and war commissions. We hoped that this would change the Americans’ attitude toward us, but to them we are still Mexicans. We are told that the trouble lies in the fact that we keep to ourselves and do not want to assimilate. Some of us are willing to do that, but how can we when not for a moment are we allowed to forget the fact that we are Mexicans? That being the case, we are not going to thrust our society upon a people who do not want us. Instead of becoming Americanized we are getting farther and farther away from that and are drawing ourselves within a shell of self-consciousness and racial pride.”

In Edinburg, Hidalgo County, I interviewed a young married man, an official in the Court House, as to what he thought the solution to the interracial problem would be.

“That is a difficult problem to solve,” said he, “we lived so long to ourselves as Mexicans, and looked upon Mexico as our country that it is hard for us to cope with the situation. We were wholly unprepared, politically, educationally, and socially when the avalanche of Americans fell upon us. The fact that we received an entirely Mexican education, I am a product of the Colegio Altamirano in Hebbronville, made it difficult for us to understand American ideals. And it is our place and our duty now to learn American ways, to send our children to American schools, to learn the English language, not that we are ashamed of our Mexican descent, but because these things will enable us to demand our rights and to improve ourselves. We understand our race, and when we are able to comprehend American ideas and ideals, American ways and customs, we shall be worth twice as much as they, and we certainly shall have the advantage over them. Americans are egoists, and provincial, they overestimate their power and doing so are unwilling to see any other way but their own, It is to our advantage then, to educate ourselves in American institutions, to learn the English language and to exercise our rights as citizens. My children are to receive a public education here, and when they graduate, I shall send them to Mexico for at least two years in order that they may perfect themselves in the Spanish language and that they may know Mexico as Mexico is. We are going now through a very painful period of transition and like the white black bird do not know yet just what we are. Mexicans from across the river look down upon us and call us by what to them is the vilest epithet, \textit{Texanos} and the Americans do not consider us as such,
When the coming of the Americans thrust them to the side of the fields, they were forced to modernize their methods of working the land. The coming of the American civilization meant to us, as to the rest of the world, that we had to change our ways of life. We had to adopt new methods of farming, new techniques, and new machinery. We had to change our ways of thinking, our ways of living, and our ways of working.

In your own words, describe how the coming of the Americans has affected the Mexican-American community.

The coming of the Americans has had a profound effect on the Mexican-American community. The Mexicans were forced to abandon their traditional ways of life and adopt new methods of farming. They had to learn new techniques, use new machinery, and change their ways of thinking and living. This was a difficult process, but it was necessary to survive in a new environment.

Two years ago in [Place], the American Legion made a resolution condemning the Mexican-American community. This resolution was made in response to the demands of certain groups who were opposed to the presence of Mexican-Americans in the United States. The resolution called for the exclusion of Mexican-Americans from certain positions in society, and for the enforcement of laws that would prevent them from participating in American life.

In your own words, describe the Mexican-American community's response to the resolution made by the American Legion.

The Mexican-American community was shocked and dismayed by the resolution made by the American Legion. They felt that this was a violation of their rights as citizens, and that it was an attempt to keep them from participating in American life. They appealed to the government to intervene and prevent the enforcement of the resolution.

In your own words, describe why the Mexican-American community feels threatened by the resolution made by the American Legion.

The Mexican-American community feels threatened by the resolution made by the American Legion because it is a reminder of the discrimination that they have faced in the past. They worry that this resolution could lead to further discrimination and to the exclusion of Mexican-Americans from certain positions in society.

In your own words, describe what you think needs to be done to ensure that Mexican-Americans are treated fairly and with respect.

To ensure that Mexican-Americans are treated fairly and with respect, it is necessary to address the discrimination that they have faced in the past. This includes the enforcement of laws that protect their rights as citizens, and the provision of equal opportunities for education and employment. It is also necessary to increase awareness of the contributions that Mexican-Americans have made to American society, and to promote understanding and acceptance of their culture and traditions.
One cannot help but wonder at the last statement.

If the older generation feels that way about Americanization the young people do not. The fact that they are all rapidly learning English points in the opposite direction. Ten years ago when visiting the Valley it was noticed that a very small percentage of the school children spoke English. The penalty for using Spanish during recess hours was to make the culprits stand at the place where they were caught in flagrante. That order had to be suspended for not one Mexican child was able to play.

Last summer when in the same community, I was amazed to hear all the children, even those under scholastic age, speak English, and slang at that.

There is a group of advanced progressive Texas-Mexicans who, realizing that the future of their children depends upon their getting an American education are sending their sons and daughters to American colleges and universities. And when these girls are among typical American college girls they are not going to sit in their rooms and uphold family traditions. When in Rome they will do as the Romans do. All of these girls are in the process of receiving their education. What their reaction will be when they go back home after four or five years of complete freedom is yet to be seen. Many of the boys are studying the professions: law, medicine, pharmacy, engineering. When this crop of American educated young men return to their respective towns, will they submit to the racial distinctions prevalent in the border towns? That also is a future problem.

Young Texas-Mexicans are being educated. Behind them lies a store of traditions of another race, customs of past ages, an innate and inherited love and reverence for another country. Ahead of them lies a struggle of which they are to be the champions. It is a struggle for equality and justice before the law, for the just demands of full-fledged American citizens. They bring with them a broader view, a clearer understanding of the good and bad qualities of both races. They are the converging element of two antagonistic civilizations; they have the blood of one and have acquired the ideals of the other. They, let it be hoped, will bring to an end the racial feuds that have existed in the border for nearly a century.

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CHAPTER 1

2. Ibid., 293.
5. México, Archivo General de la Nación, Historia, Descripción General de la Nueva Colonia de Santander, Tomo 55, p. 64, University of Texas Library.
6. El Frontiero (Río Grande City), September 15, 1925.
7. México, Archivo General de la Nación, Tomo 55, p. 64, University of Texas Library.
9. Ibid., 207.
10. Ibid., 212.
16. Ibid.
17. Emilio del Castillo Negrete, México en el Siglo XIX, 141.

Notes
CHAPTER 3

The year 1917. A year of crisis. The United States enters the war against Germany. The war effort brings changes in the United States that affect American Chinese. The Chinese community in the United States faces new challenges and opportunities.

The Chinese American community is divided over the war. Some Chinese support the Allied powers, while others remain neutral. The Chinese government in China is also divided, with some leaders supporting the Allies and others opposing them.

Despite the divisions, the Chinese community in the United States comes together to support the war effort. Chinese Americans work on the home front, volunteering for the armed forces and working in factories. The Chinese community also provides aid to Chinese soldiers overseas.

The war causes significant changes in the Chinese community in the United States. Many Chinese American families are forced to leave their homes and businesses due to discrimination and violence. The war also leads to the development of new institutions and organizations, such as the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

The war ends in 1918, but the impact of the conflict on the Chinese community in the United States continues. The war has a lasting effect on the community, shaping its future for generations to come.