Mexican Expulsions & Indian Removal during the Early Period of Global Mass Immigrations

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The election of the first African American president in the United States marked a watershed in 2008 that was quickly overshadowed by another startling first: record-breaking deportations, especially to Mexico and Central America. This observation was made on the 4th of July 2010 edition of ABC's This Week, by Univisión news anchor Jorge Ramos, when he stated: "President Barack Obama has deported more people in his first year in office than George W. Bush in his last year in office." In fact, it is now common knowledge among both Mexicans and North American audiences that upwards of 400,000 ethnic Mexicans and Central Americans are being deported annually by the Obama Administration. The New York Times recently reported that the Obama Administration has now deported "well over 2 million during his time in office." Noteworthy was the following observation, "Mexicans were once again by far the largest group among deportees, making up 72 percent. But there were significant increases in migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, the countries that were home to most migrants in a surge of illegal crossings in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas during the past year."1

Deportations in the US, however, have a genealogy that can be traced to the early nineteenth century and one that took place amid the passage of various *Indian Removal Acts*, which had the same consequences for their targeted populations. As such, this brief article seeks to analyze the brief history of these deportations since their appearance in the archival record, and then attempt to highlight these little known *Mexican Removal Acts* during this period that coincided with simultaneous Indian removals that are covered extensively in the secondary literature.²

Examining early cases of Mexicans expulsions during the first half of the nineteenth century, and within the context of early Indian Removal Acts that stipulated the forced removal from one territory to another, illustrates quite clearly the kind of "emigrants" which were desired, and which were not. It is no coincidence that the first recorded expulsions of Mexican citizens took place at exactly the same time as the passage of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, and much of the same rhetoric and justification for the forced removal of Mexican communities shared many similarities with their Native American cousins and counterparts. As Professor Daniel Kanstroom of Boston College has noted, Indian Removal is not only intimately tied the founding the US, but also constitutes a series of steps that paved the road for the formulation of a national deportation system. Phrased another way, Indian Removal Acts are not only laws intended to remove one group of people into other areas for the benefit of squatters and settlers, but these laws become the legal foundation and justification of our own contemporary legal deportation regimes. Professor Kanstroom argues that contemporary deportation policies are part and parcel of a legal genealogy that includes past legal precedents like the Indian Removal Acts and Fugitive Slave Laws.3 Because these expulsions are disproportionately composed of ethnic Mexicans and Central Americans (Mesoamerican and Indigenous peoples), they are akin to modern day Indian Removal Acts in opinion

of the author, and this intent and practice to remove these populations from the body politic is embedded within the latest "studies" on "American identity," in state laws and immigration legislation curtailing Mexican migrant activities, and particularly in the legislative corpus of "Immigration Reform."

Historical Background

In the years that followed Independence from European rule and in the exuberance of defeating their one-time colonizers, the young nations of the Americas sought to throw off the yoke of colonialism while simultaneously inviting the migration and settlement of Europeans. This effort to attract European immigrants in the aftermath of American and Mexican Independence coincided with a period of global mass migrations that lasted for about a century. Historian of Latin America José Moya asserts that the movement of Europeans that began modestly after the end of the "Latin American wars of Independence gathered steam after mid-century, reached massive proportions after the 1870s, and lasted—with a pause during WWI—until the Great Depression" was unprecedented: "[N]othing resembling this massive movement had ever happened before anywhere on the planet," and nothing similar has happened since.4 That is, until the next large wave of global immigrations would overwhelm the numbers witnessed during the first wave, and which began in earnest immediately during and after WWII.

Scholars of this first periodization in world history, however, contend that most researchers who discuss world migrations often ignore the larger pattern of movements across the globe occurring at the exact same time. These critics argue that African and Asian migrations are ignored and "when mentioned, are usually described only as indentured migration subject to the needs of Europeans or as peasants fleeing overpopulation pressures." As such, Historian Adam McKeown reminds us that along with the millions of Europeans coming to the Western hemisphere after several Latin American nations gained their Independence, 48-52 million Indians and southern Chinese migrated to Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific; while 46-51 million Russians and Northeastern Asians migrated to points in Manchuria, Siberia, Central Asia, and Japan. In short order, the period between 1846 and 1940 witnessed the global migration of 160 million individuals, and thus Latin America become one site of these multiple settlements.⁵ These mass movements of people had obvious impacts for the receiving nations and their indigenous populations.

In the United States, which received the vast majority of European immigrants arriving during the first period (1830-1930), millions would arrive and begin the process of westward expansion with the assistance of other pieces of legislation, like the 1830 Indian Removal Act and The Preemption Act of the same year, which passed a mere 3 days later. The Preemption Act of 1830, according to economic historians Leonard A. Carlson and Mark A. Roberts, "changed the system to one where illegal settlers on the public domain (squatters) could buy land they occupied at the minimum price." For them, "the Removal Act and the Preemption Act represent two sides of the same coin: the desire of settlers to acquire land cheaply and the desire to open more Indian land for settlement." This economic impulse of obtaining lands and properties is usually the motive that drives a number of

examples that deal with the expulsion of peoples from their lands.

The expulsion of particular peoples from one geographical space to another is surely part of a broader history of human settlement and social tension that goes back several millennia. But for our purposes and to remain closer to the Americas, it was perhaps the mass expulsion of Jesuits from the Portuguese and Spanish Empires in 1767 that led to an expulsion zeitgeist of sorts, and one that would take on a new meaning after the defeat of Spain in 1821. According to one study, the case of Mexico, unlike those of its new neighbors to the south and in the Caribbean, was the most violent case of Spanish expulsions. These prolonged and complicated processes culminated in several federal level laws against Spaniards residing in Mexico, and as usual, were grounded amid economic competition.

At almost the same time, numerous "Indian Removal Acts" were being passed and enforced in the United States of America right across the boundary that separated the US from the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas—an area that was already experiencing these demographic tensions. The several years following the Texas uprising in 1835, the repeated attempt by various Mexican administrations to reconquer Texas, especially in 1842, only complicated an already altered state of affairs, and served as yet another opportunity to question the loyalty of ethnic-Mexicans. In this historical context, and amid this round of global "expulsions," those of the ethnic-Mexican population are revealed to us via the archival record.

The earliest episodes of ethnic Mexicans experiencing expulsion at the hands of another government takes place in what is today the state of Texas and amid a shifting increase in Euro-American and European immigration. Migration to what was then the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas had been steadily increasing since the mid eighteenth century, but saw its most significant increase in population once Moses Austin secured a colonization contract a year before Mexican Independence. After the cessation of hostilities between Spain and Mexico, his son Stephen, would continue in these efforts to colonize settlers in Mexican territory that would be willing to adopt the Catholic religion, learn Spanish, and perhaps even marry a Mexican citizen. Although relations between these new settlers and the older Mexican populations of Texas was cordial, at least among the elite, these particular relationships soured somewhat amid the ongoing rebellion against state centralization in 1835. The conflict quickly escalated into a war between these new settlers and the administration of Santa Anna, and the latter was later made to sign over the state to these rebellious colonists.

With the recent trauma that usually accompanies massacres and violent conflicts, like those in San Antonio de Bejar and Goliad, a number of the new inhabitants of Texas began to call for the expulsion of all ethnic Mexicans during the height of conflict in 1836. An examination of a few of these materials from the Mexican archive should provide us with enough historical evidence to begin situating the context of these first acts of "expulsion" against ethnic Mexicans in the state of Texas.

Early Expulsions and Fears of Another Massacre

Writing from New Orleans in the middle of July of 1836, the Mexican consulate wrote to his superior, the Mexican

Minister of Foreign Relations in Philadelphia that 100 citizens of their republic had arrived at the Port of New Orleans via Texas in a wretched state of affairs. The Mexican consulate added that a particular US General had issued a warning to the citizens of Guadalupe Victoria, Goliad, and De León County to leave the territory or be put to the knife. General Rusk, the military commander who ordered the expulsion of all Mexicans from this region issued the following warning to the citizens of two towns in the following manner:

The Citizens of Guadalupe Victoria and Goliad are required, by asking thus for their personal security, of marching immediately towards the East. They will be able to go as they like, this is, by land or by sea; although the latter route is considered preferable for reasons that a trip through land would expose them to objections and labors, and that in actuality there are sufficient embarkations in La Bahia that have been detained for this effect. They will all be given Passports and Letters of Protection, through which they will receive the best treatment. There is no longer a neutral country; Texas will be free, or it will become a desert.

Although Rusk confirmed that letters of protection, the best treatment, and passports would be granted to these refugees from Texas, he made it clear that it was not possible to remain neutral in this war for "Texas Freedom." His use of the phrase, "Texas will be free or will be converted into a desert" suggests that Texas will be free once ethnic Mexicans, even those who had demonstrated their loyalty to Texas by fighting alongside these rebellious colonists, were expelled from their lands, thus removing the main obstacle to further Euro-American colonization of the area.

Rusk would issue another warning six days later, according to the Mexican consulate, where he stated, "The families that reside in the Ranchos and in the immediacies of La Punta, will be transferred aboard in brief time, since the circumstances require it as such; being the desire, not to detain the march of the ships, but instead to be most precise." This was done because there were Texas military volunteers showing "symptoms of wanting to pass under the knife all Mexicans." Presumably, the traumatized volunteers that Rusks mentioned were showing the typical signs of war and combat by not discriminating between the combatants. These expelled arrived at the port in Louisiana in a miserable state, and what was worse, the Mexican government, preoccupied with its own internal revolutions and uprisings, was unable to provide protection or assistance for the repatriation of those citizens towards Mexican territory. As the response by the Mexican representatives in Philadelphia makes clear,

> The position therefore of those unfortunates is of the most pitiful. If at the very least they would have been allowed to disembark at some point along the coast of Mexico, they would have even found aid and consolation; but due to a refinement of cruelty, that public opinion will quickly qualify, they have been sent to a strange land, whose tongue they do not understand,

whose customs they do not know, and because of this same thing, not even their personal labor will be able to procure in much time the medium to prolong their miserable existence.⁹

Compounding the troubles of the expelled was their inability to speak the language of the region and unfamiliarity with local customs. Such would be the case following the end of hostilities a decade later during the U.S.–Mexican War (1846–1848), particularly in those areas where ethnic Mexicans became the minority.

This early violence can be traced in large measure to the aftermath of the "Texas Revolution of 1836," especially the various attempts by Mexico to reconquer Texas. The Euro-American population, having suffered severe casualties in that conflict, sought retaliation against the Mexican communities, and turned first to the settlements along the Guadalupe and San Antonio rivers. According to the historical sociology of David Montejano's research, "In 1837 the Mexican communities of Victoria, San Patricio, La Bahía (Goliad), and Refugio were the first to feel the vengeance for the massacres at Goliad and the Alamo."10 The earlier Mexican violence was thus reciprocated in the form of these expulsions in Texas. The town of La Bahía, for instance, was razed along with the church and the fort that had been built by the Mexican government. One of the biographers of the founding family noted that although loyal to the Texan cause, "this family like other loyal Mexican families were driven from their homes, their treasures, their cattle and horses and their lands, by an army of reckless, war-crazy people, who overran the town of Victoria. These new people hated the Mexicans, simply because they were Mexican, regardless of the fact that they were both on the same side of the fighting during the war."

In 1839 another hundred Mexican families "were forced to abandon their homes and lands in the old settlement of Nacogdoches in what is now East Texas."11 The individuals who avoided being expelled would eventually take refuge further south at Carlos' Ranch. However, this group lived in constant fear of raiding and threats of violence from the burgeoning white population who had not forgotten the death trap at "the Alamo" and the massacre at Goliad only three years earlier. During that summer, "these bandits gave warning of their intention to visit Carlos' Ranch (where residents from Victoria and Goliad had taken refuge in 1836) in order to burn it down and kill all the Mexicans belonging to it." These threats were not acted upon until the Mexican government made an effort to reconquer Texas and occupied San Antonio in 1842. At this time "Anglos angered over the invasion from Mexico destroyed the ranch and compelled the families to leave the Republic."12

These expulsions, not surprisingly, were in many cases responses to real and perceived Mexican violence, or for the purposes of material gain, either political or economic in nature. Retaliation on the part of Mexicans, therefore, is no surprise to any astute observer of nineteenth-century race relations in the Southwest U.S., especially in the case of Texas. Here, the violence of the frontier was inflicted not only by Native Americans upon other Indigenous groups, but also by Spanish Mexicans who settled in areas like San Antonio and Goliad beginning in the early eighteenth century. Relations were

generally cordial, despite the periodic confrontations between Tejanos and various Native American groups; however, the arrival of Euro-American colonists and African American slaves made the situation more complicated and volatile.

The frontier experience of the region coupled with Mexican American's long fighting tradition as military colonists ushered in a very long period of reciprocal violence between all of these groups. Some historians have gone as far as characterizing this period as one of "Ethnic Cleansing" or the creation of a "Lynching Culture," but for our purposes, the rise of social banditry and revenge killings were also part and parcel of the environment that gave rise to these mass expulsions of Mexicans during this time.¹³ The Goliad Massacre that occurred in 1836 was investigated by contemporaries of the period, who concluded, "A man-by-man study of Fannin's command indicates that 342 were executed at Goliad on March 27. Only twentyeight escaped the firing squads, and twenty more were spared as physicians, orderlies, interpreters, or mechanics," the latter because of their expertise in one craft or another. 14 At the battle of the Alamo, between 150 and 250 "Texians" and a number of Tejanos also lost their lives in the battle with the Mexican Army headed by Santa Ana, including those who gave themselves up in surrender. Therefore, we must recognize that the mass killing of Euro-Americans at Goliad, the Alamo, and the rise of the Cordova Rebellion contributed to an atmosphere of fear and violence that was punctuated by these periodic expulsions of Mexicans. Efforts by the Mexican state to reconquer Texas after it had been signed over by Santa Ana in 1836 were also occasions to reconsider the loyalty of native Tejanos and thus provided the conditions to expel at will.

The Significance of 1842 & Fears of "Mongrel Mexicans"

Indeed, it was the 1842 effort to reconquer the lost Texas Republic by the Mexican government that initiated yet another round of intense expulsions of those Mexicans unfortunate enough to be residing in that territory, even if they had fought for independence from Mexico.¹⁵ Historians of the Mexican experience in Texas have documented many of these earlier expulsions and they argue that harassment by Anglos was a daily occurrence for Texas Mexicans, especially after the second attempt by the Mexican government to recoup this lost territory. In the wake of this latter attempt, the white populations of Texas considered banishing all Mexicans from the newly formed republic. According to an editorial that the author cites:

There is no faith to be put in them; and until the war is ended, they should be compelled, every one of them, to retire either east or west from the frontier; or if they chose to remain, be subjected to the rigorous treatment due to enemies.¹⁶

No longer considered allies in the cause of Texan independence, these Texas Mexicans were now seen as "enemies" and therefore eligible for expulsion, even though it was the Tejanos who had initiated this rebellion against the Mexican state!¹⁷ Now outnumbered and without the protection of the government, numerous families fled south towards Mexico and to areas where Mexicans had some numerical superiority. However, as De León points out

in his extensive history of the Tejano experience throughout the nineteenth century, volunteers from the Texas regiments

acted very badly, having ventured to force the Mexican families from their homes, [causing them] to droop about in the woods and seek shelter wherever they could find it. Moreover, to gratify their beastly lusts [they have] compelled the women and girls to yield to their hellish desires, which their victims did under fear of punishment and death.¹⁸

Such episodes would occur frequently in the period leading up to the U.S.–Mexican War that broke out four years later. By then increased violence and the lack of political and economic instability that accompanies most wartime situations would force still more families to migrate southwards in search of protection. These difficult conditions were not enough, however, to deter hundreds of Mexican families from returning to those lands that they considered their own; and by the end of the war, hundreds of heads of household had returned and appealed for reinstatement of their land titles and properties. ¹⁹

Imagining Mexican & Black Conspiracies

Other expulsions would follow in those areas where Euro-Americans would become the majority and where Mexicans were seen as threats to social, political, and economic hegemony: Seguin, Austin, Uvalde, Matagorda, San Antonio, and Colorado, Texas. What was especially dangerous was the perceived collusion of Mexicans with African Americans and the former's opposition to slavery. In the case of Austin, Mexicans were driven out not once, but twice. One sociologist who has done extensive historical research tells us that "Mexicans were driven from Austin in 1853 and again in 1855, from Seguin in 1854, from the counties of Matagorda and Colorado in 1856, and from Uvalde in 1857."20 Many of these expulsions grew out of fear of Mexican and African American alliances and economic considerations related to slavery. In a newspaper of the era, for instance, this fear of a Mexican-Black allegiance was imagined in both economic and sexual terms:

Matagorda—The people of Matagorda County have held a meeting and ordered every Mexican to leave the county. To strangers this may seem wrong, but we hold it to be perfectly right and highly necessary; but a word of explanation should be given. In the first place, then, there are none but the lower class or "Peon" Mexicans in the county; secondly, they have no domicile, but hang around plantations, taking the likeliest Negro girls for wives; and, thirdly, they often steal horses, and these girls, too, and endeavor to run them to Mexico. We should rather have anticipated an appeal to Lynch Law, than the mild course which has been adopted.²¹

Here the expulsion of all Mexicans is not seen as problematic; in fact, it is a palatable alternative to something more severe and sinister like "Lynch Law." The fact that "Negro girls" and "horses" are both seen as property should not surprise those familiar with the economics of a slave society; however,

the accusation that Mexicans endeavoured to run slaves and freedmen into Mexico is not without merit.²² This fact was not lost on the new settlers of the Texas Republic who noted Mexican hatred of the institution of slavery that in Mexico had been outlawed since Independence. This contradiction served to further the pretext that Mexicans were disloyal and ought to be expelled from their own lands.

The noted economist and student of the Mexican American experience in Texas, Paul Schuster Taylor, cited this antagonism as one of the main sources of conflict between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas during the mid-nineteenth century. In the mid-1850s, for instance, a plot by African Americans was discovered in Colorado County and Mexicans were immediately cited as the primary instigators of this rebellion to kill the "white masters." The committee of whites announced to their community that "without exception every Mexican in the county was implicated. They were arrested and ordered to leave the country within five days and never to return...We are satisfied that the lower class of the Mexican population are incendiaries in any country where slaves are held, and should be dealt with accordingly."23 Delegates from several counties west of the Colorado River met in October of 1854 in order to enact stern measures directed against Mexican-Black association in Texas. The convention "resolved that counties should organized vigilance committees to persecute persons tampering with slaves and that all citizens and slaveholders were to work diligently to prohibit Mexicans from contacting blacks."24 The town of Seguin followed suit and "drafted resolutions prohibiting Mexican peons from entering the country and forbidding Mexicans to associate with blacks."25 Even in a town founded and largely populated Mexicans and Mexican Americans the threat of expulsion was felt. 26

Concluding Remarks

Although we do not have the luxury of more refined statistics for the early nineteenth century, this latter expulsion was not the first of its kind, nor would it be the last in the state of Texas, or in other former Mexican territories. Even with the sophisticated instruments of surveillance, security, and demographic statistics, both the US and Mexico are unable to give an accurate account of the "undocumented" in the US, or the millions that have already been deported to Mexico since 2003. What we do have for this particular period, hence, are moments that serve as eventful microcosms into larger historical events, or what William H. Sewell referred to as "ruptures in the structure." When the archive reveals an expulsion, the expelled and the observer is necessarily in an intertextual dialogue that occurs on various levels, and that hint at larger patterns that in many instances have to do with the usual basic source of tension between ethnic and religious groups: economic competition.

In sum, these early expulsions from 1836 through the late 1850s mark an initial period of mass Mexican expulsions that oddly coincides with those *Indian Removal Acts* of the 1830s. This period begins in the violent aftermath of the so-called "Texas Revolution of 1836" and in the wake of the demographic occupation of what had been Mexican territory. Mexican expulsions, like later *Indian Removal Acts*, continued in the 1840s when Mexico tried unsuccessfully to reconquer Texas

and then once more in the 1850s when Mexicans were accused of colluding with freedman and African American slaves. The next period of Mexican expulsions encompasses the latter half of the nineteenth century and extends into the twentieth century; these expulsions were justified on dubious grounds similar to those of the first period. What was different in this era, however, was that the question of expulsion forced the Mexican government to deal with this once-lost population by formulating of a colonization policy that would simultaneously address the need to repatriate these citizens while fortifying the frontier against perceived "enemies of the state." In a cruel cycle of history stemming back to the *Indian Removal Acts* of the early nineteenth century, deportees and those expelled are now transformed into "enemies of the state" by governments of both the US and the receiving countries.

- 1 Julia Prescott, "Deportation Up in 2013; Border Sites Were Focus; Deportations Surged in 2013, Data Shows, *The New York Times*, 1 October 2014.
- 2 See, for instance, James W Parins, Ed. *Encyclopedia of American Indian Removal*, *2 vols* (Santa Barbara, Greenwood, 2011), passim.
- 3 Daniel Kanstroom, Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 4 José Moya, "A Continent of Immigrants: Postcolonial Shifts in the Western Hemisphere," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86:1, (February 2006): 1-28.
- 5 Adam McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846-1940," *Journal of World History, 15; 2*, (June 2004): 155–189.
- 6 Leonard A. Carlson and Mark A. Roberts, "Economic Interests and the Passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830," *Explorations in Economic History 43*, (2006): 486-504.
- 7 "Carta de Francisco Prianzo Martínez de Nueva Orleáns a Secretaria de Relaciones Esteriores en Filadelfia," 17 de Julio de 1836, en AHSRE, L-E-1078 (13), 118-119.
- 8 "Carta de Francisco Prianzo Martínez de Nueva Orleáns a Secretaria de Relaciones Esteriores en Filadelfia," 17 de Julio de 1836, en AHSRE, L-E-1078 (13), 118-119; Original: "síntomas de querer pasar a cuchillo a todo Mexicano."
- 9 "Carta de M. E. de Gorostiza y Señor Don Joaquín M. de Castillo y Lanzas," 5 Agosto de 1836, in *Ibíd.*, 122-124.
- 10 David Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987), 26-27.
- 11 A.B.J. Hammett, *The Empresario: Don Martín de León,* (Waco: Texian Press, 1973); in *Ibid*.
- 12 Arnoldo De León, *They Called them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900,* (Austin: The University of

Texas Press, 1983), 78.

- 13 See for instance, William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); also Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest Of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing In The Promised Land, 1820-1875*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), passim.
- 14 Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Goliad Massacre," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/qeg2.html (accessed May 1, 2007).
- 15 Joseph Milton Nance, *Attack and Counter-Attack: The Texas-Mexican Frontier*, 1842, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), passim.
- 16 De León, *The Tejano Community*, 1836-1900, (Albuq.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 14-15.
- 17 Reséndez, Changing National Identities, passim.
- 18 De León, The Tejano Community, 14-15.
- 19 Castillo Crimm, *De León*, passim; Armando Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas*, 1734-1900, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), passim.
- 20 Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans, 28.
- 21 Quoted in *Ibid*, full text is located In Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas, or, a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier; with a Statistical Appendix,* (New York: Dix, Edwards & Co., 1857), 502.
- 22 Ronnie C. Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 57;1, (Jan. 1972): 1-12.
- 23 Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier: Nueces County, Texas*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 37.
- 24 De León, They Called them Greasers, 51.
- 25 De León, The Tejano Community, 15.
- 26 Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 31 and De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 51.

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