

THE SPANISH LEGACY IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST AND THE QUESTION OF CITIZENSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Spain's long hegemony over large portions of the Americas throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has left an enduring legacy. The particularity of the Spanish colonial system, however, has resulted in the emergence of a distinctive culture that stemmed from the Spanish as well as Indian traditions. The significance of this Indian-Spanish heritage is that it heavily influenced the Anglo racialization of the ceded lands Mexicans. While the Spanish element seemed, at times, to be an efficient means by which Mexicans could acquire a good position in the American racial order, the same Spanish element also seemed to be a curse on Mexicans.

Keywords: Spanish legacy; American racial order; Anglo-Americans; Mexicans.

INTRODUCTION

Many Anglo-Americans looked with resentment at the whole Spanish colonial system in the American continent. Thus, they have decisively related the Mexicans' regression to their Spanish past. "A race that was molded in the financial monastery schools is sufficient explanation of the medieval character of the population of the Southwest at the time of [its] incorporation into the union of the States." reported some Protestant missionaries in 1916. Hence, in order to better comprehend the American racialization to the ceded lands inhabitants one should refer to the multiple interpretations of the Spanish experience in North America as well as to the different positions of the Anglo American writers with relation to the Spanish past.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin with, the Anglo American writers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries generally viewed the Spanish experience in the Americas with much contempt. The Spanish misgovernment of the Americas, most of those writers argued, stemmed from the inherently flawed character of Spaniards. This bigotry against Spaniards was in fact deeply rooted in the European history. The Protestant revolution that swept most northern parts of Europe during the sixteenth century created a strong sentiment of contempt and mistrust among northern Europeans against their Catholic counterparts of the southern rim of the European continent. Thus, most Europeans viewed the Catholic Spaniards along with the increasingly imperialistic orientation of their nation as a solemn source of fretfulness. Upon the discovery of the New World, however, this Hispanophobia crossed the Atlantic; it soon evolved to a sort of propaganda against everything Spanish or associated with Spaniards. Anglo American writers, like William Robertson, undertook the responsibility to conduct such propaganda that Spaniards came to the New World merely in search of gold and to exploit Indians. Those writings invoked a sharp contrast between indolent Spaniards who came to exploit and rob

Indians of lands, on the one hand, and the English who came to build institutions, cultivate land and establish civilization, on the other.¹

METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this research paper is the socio-historical approach. The description and interpretation of the Southwest American racial order in the nineteenth century by means of such approach enables one have a comprehensive view of the social stratification at the time along with subsequent quandaries emerging from such a rigid system of classification.

As such, the point will then be whether this system had indeed affected the question of citizenship for the ceded lands population for years to come or it, rather, constituted but a phase of the U.S. history that has long contributed in shaping the contemporary American identity.

RESULTS

The historic enmities between Anglo-Saxon Protestant United States and Catholic Spain, called otherwise the Black Legend, reinforced a chaotic relation along the border lands between the two countries. Therefore, the Black Legend continued to hamper any attempt toward understanding the Spanish legacy in North America and toward every fair judgment to its past, Mexicans have been made a scapegoat for all what Americans regarded as negative aspects about the Spanish colonial system in the Americas. Because of the Black Legend, Anglo-Americans failed to show any objective view of the political, economic, religious and social aspects of the Mexican society.

Still worse, even those Anglo-Americans who had developed a moderate view toward America's Spanish heritage failed to include all the inhabitants of the region. Apart from Spaniards, the other constituents of the Mexican society, that is, Pueblos and mestizos were all exempted. Moreover, they were ignored and discriminated against soon after they had been incorporated into the United States population. Bolton, himself, while celebrating Spaniards, suggested that Mexicans, deemed half breeds mestizos or mulattos, were naturally inferior because of their relative poverty and backwardness engendered from "[their] cultural deficiencies including passivity, laziness and inability to look beyond the present."²

DISCUSSION

Territorial rivalry, in the newly discovered continent, first between Spain and Britain and later between Spain and the United States, had also added to this severe propaganda which came to be known as "la leyenda negra" among Spanish scholars and historians. Naturally, one could see the point of a commutative relationship between the "the Black Legend" and the U.S. territorial expansion. At a time when the Black Legend justified territorial expansion at the expense of former Spanish colonies, the propaganda that accompanied territorial expansion, in turn, intensified the Black Legend. Making the best use of the Black Legend, William Shaler sought a justification for the acquisition of California when he preached in 1803 that California needed "*nothing but a good government to rise rapidly to wealth and*

¹ David J. Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996) 68.

² David G. Gutiérrez, "The Third Generation: Reflections on Recent Chicano Historiography," *Mexican Studies* 5, (Summer 1989) 282-4.

importance."³ Likewise did Stephen F. Austin who described the conflict between Texas and Mexico as nothing but "a war of barbarism and of despotic principles, waged by the mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race against civilization and the Anglo-American Race"⁴. Furthermore, the density of the Black Legend, that is, the severity of the anti-Hispanic propaganda was very often determined by the extent to which Anglo Americans thought of the Hispanic population as an obstacle to the Anglo American westward expansion. That is why the harshness of the Black Legend varied from an area to another throughout the former Spanish lands. The ease with which the United States acquired Louisiana and Florida made Americans unusually praise and respect the inhabitants of those lands. Governor William D. Duval reported in 1822 from Pensacola to President Monroe that "*the Spanish inhabitants of this country are the best even among the most quiet and orderly of our own citizens.*" Similarly, many other American writers came to think of the Spanish past, especially in the Southeast, as being more virtuous than what the Black Legend evoked. Spain has often been praised for its policy toward Indians and its system of justice.⁵ There had been even times when Anglo American writers overweighed the Spaniards' experience over that of their French counterparts in the areas which happened to be colonized by France as well as by Spain. Generally, the American territorial experience in the Southeast was so different from its experience in the Southwest. The simplicity and straightforwardness which the Anglo American expansionists had experienced in Louisiana and Florida were opposed by warfare and hardships in Texas, New Mexico and California. So were the admiration and commendation for the Spanish legacy in the Southeast paralleled by denouncement and condemnation in the Southwest.⁶

Apart from the very few works of Washington Irving and William H. Prescott who dealt with the Spanish culture with much appreciation and respect, the Black Legend continued to blur American writings until the last two decades of the 19th century. The period witnessed the fulfilment of the Manifest Destiny and the United States stretched its boundaries up to the Pacific. There were no more territories for expansion. Thus, the Black Legend "*abated rapidly*". There was no need for the Black Legend any more. Throughout the course of territorial expansion, the Black Legend fuelled expansion. Ironically, the Spanish legacy became a subject of not only appreciation but celebration as well.⁷ In a letter to some of Santa Fe's leading citizens in 1883, Walt Whitman wrote, "*It is time to realize that there will not be found any more, tyranny, superstition in the resume past Spanish history than in the corresponding resume of Anglo-Norman history*"⁸. In short, the time was ripe for the reversal of the Black Legend.

What is more, the spirit of the pro-Spanish legacy in the Southwest, particularly in California, seemed to be brought about with deep changes at the level of society as the latter was getting more and more industrious. The social transformation brought about by the gold rush and the subsequent ascendancy of capitalist values all have resulted in a growing nostalgic view to the pastoral values of the Indian-Spanish past.⁹ "*There never was a more peaceful or happy people on the face of the earth than the Spanish, Mexican and Indian population of Alta*

³ Quoted in David J. Weber, *supra* note 10, at 13.

⁴ Quoted in David J. Weber, *supra* note 7, at 12.

⁵ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 338.

⁶ Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians 1846-1890*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 14-18.

⁷ <http://college.cengage.com/history/us/resources/students/primary/indo.htm>

⁸ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, op. cit., 341.

⁹ <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft758007r3;chunk.id=0;doc.view=print>

California before the American conquest,”¹⁰ wrote Guadalupe Vallejo in 1890. In the same way, the pro-Spanish legacy advocates sentimentalized over picturesque New Mexico, which in their views, outshone any other art in any other old Spanish border lands¹¹. Its religious wooden carvings, on which saints or *Santos* are painted, called otherwise *retablos*, once neglected and denied as works of art, came to be valued and reconsidered as part of the indigenous artistic phenomenon in the United States. In reality, they were, to a certain extent, a factual imitation of the seventeenth century prototypes of Spain.¹²

Furthermore, the Spanish legacy is not all traced merely to the colonial period. New Mexicans, too, created their own historical commemorations; yet, their traditions still have strong connections with the Spanish past in the region.¹³ The *Santa Fe Fiesta* that commemorates the Spanish conquest of the city in 1692, the Taos *Pueblo's Fiesta of San Geronimo* in September and the *Whole Enchilada Fiesta and Annual International Mariachi Concert*, in Las Cruces in October all represent a heritage which is a mixture of Indian and Spanish. Most of these festivals are accompanied with Native American dances such as the Harvest Dance and the Sun Dance.¹⁴

By the twentieth century, the Black Legend seemed to have been totally abandoned. Rather, the Spanish legacy seemed to experience an unprecedented revival. The Spanish architecture, however, received the lion's share. The Country Club Plaza and the Public Library in Kansas City are only realistic examples about the influence of the Spanish architecture on American construction.¹⁵ The Spanish style spread throughout the country “*even in places with no significant link to the Spanish era such as Kansas City and Dallas*”.¹⁶ By the 1930s, the influence seemed to have touched churches, hotels, banks, shopping centres and even public buildings to the extent that many were given Spanish names as a matter of fashion.

The artistic, social and cultural Spanish revival in the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century brought about crucial changes in the academia as well. Many scholars and historians felt an urgent need for rethinking the Spanish past of the United States. Some went even further as did the Spanish scholar, *Miguel Romera-Novarro*, who argued that the Spanish heritage merited celebration. He reminded Americans that “[they] should not be able to forget that two-thirds of their country has been Spanish territory.”¹⁷ Romera went on to remind Americans of those Spaniards who first explored the continent, named it, settled it and deposited people “*who still speak, feel and think in Spanish*.”¹⁸ Similarly, *Carlos Fernández-Shaw* conducted a study in which he examined Spain's influence on all aspects of American cultures inserting hundreds of lists of Spanish “firsts” in the United States in his book, *Spanish Presence in the United States* first published

¹⁰Guadalupe Vallejo, “Ranch and Mission Days in Alta California”, *The Century Magazine*, Vol XLI, December 1890. <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/rancho.html>>.

¹¹ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, op. cit., 346.

¹² Richard L. Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press) 10.

¹³ <http://www.kidzworld.com/article/4973-hispanic-culture-and-traditions>

¹⁴ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* op. cit., 337.

¹⁵ James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, “American Houses, Spanish Styles”, <http://www.oldhousejournal.com/American_Houses_Spanish_Styles/magazine/1302>.

¹⁶ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* op. cit., 353.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* 354.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

in 1972. The book included monuments of individual Spaniards, motels and many other public places with Spanish names.¹⁹

Still, many other scholars, taking the lead from Earl Pomeroy, took just an opposite firm stand against overemphasizing the Spanish past. They argued that contemporary scholars had simply exaggerated the significance of the Spanish presence in North America. In this respect, Pomeroy writes, “*the native Spanish and Mexican elements in many parts of the West particularly California where they are revered today were small and uninfluential [sic]*”²⁰. In fact, that might well be true with respect to pure Spaniards who were few in border lands such as New Mexico. Such scholars who emphasized Spaniards in those regions were often criticized for “*losing sight of the fact that genetically and culturally, the society of northern New Spain had been essentially mestizo or Mexican*”²¹. A leading figure of those scholars who glorified the Spanish heritage but dishonoured everything Mexican was Eugene Bolton from the University of California at Berkeley. He was a pioneer in reversing the Black Legend. He trained a large cadre of doctoral candidates longing for “[*enlarg [ing] the scope of American history beyond its well-known English, Dutch and French antecedents] including the nation’s Spanish origins*” as part of the U.S. history as well.²² Nonetheless, like most social scientists in his day, he considered “*Mexicans (half breeds mestizoes or mulattoes) naturally vicious and unruly*”²³. Bolton explained their poverty as a reasonable consequence of their “*cultural deficiencies, including passivity, laziness and inability to look beyond the present.*”²⁴ Furthermore, other historians argue that the anguish that Spaniards experienced in North America all had resulted from the northward territorial expansion of the Spanish empire. As Spaniards “*had pushed the Spanish frontier northward cutting like a blade of Damascus steel*”, the eminent historian Walter Prescott Webb noted in 1931, “[*they] mingled with sedentary Indian stock, whose blood...was ditch water, the steel lost its temper*”²⁵. The implication is that Indians were the root cause of contaminating the European pure Spaniards. Also, the conditions of life on the northern frontier of Mexico aggravated the position of its inhabitants of Mexicans. Soldiers and Anglo-American visitors recognized the difference between the mongrel race of Mexicans who inhabited the northern frontier and “*the true Mexican character...in Mexico’s interior*”.²⁶

Notwithstanding these accusations, a number of critics stated that the scholars and historians, like Bolton, who glorified the Spanish past in the American Southwest, had only been charged with what Carey McWilliams called a “fantasy heritage”. Writing in 1948, he asserts that a “fantasy heritage” had simply preyed upon the minds of those Americans who had enthusiasm for the Spanish legacy in the Southwest but discriminated against its inhabitants:

¹⁹ “Spanish Contributions to North America”,

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/jeff/lewisclark2/circa1804/heritage/SpanishInfluence/SpanishInfluence.htm>

²⁰ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, op. cit., 355.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.* 353-354.

²³ Herbert E. Bolton, “Mission as a Frontier Institution,”

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/_Topics/history/_Texts/journals/AHR/23/1/Mission_as_a_Frontier_Institution*.html

²⁴ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, op. cit., 356.

²⁵ David Stroud, “Walter Prescott Webb”, <http://www.texasranger.org/E-Books/Walter%20Prescott%20Webb.pdf>;

see also David J. Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* op. cit., 76-77. Cf. George O’Har, “Where the Buffalo Roam: Walter Prescott Webb’s *The Great Plains*” <http://etc.technologyandculture.net/2007/12/where-the-buffalo-roam/>

²⁶ Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 166.

Indians and mestizos. According to McWilliams, the Mexicans who chose to identify themselves as Spaniards also fell under the spell of that “fantasy heritage”.²⁷

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks go to Dr. Senouci Faiza for continued help and consistent assistance.

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²⁷ “A Fantasy Heritage?:” a review of the changing literature on Hispano identity in New Mexico.

http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-12100331/A-Fantasy-Heritage-a-review.html

McWilliams alludes to the Mexicans who immigrated during the 1910s.