Introduction

History can either oppress or liberate a people. Generalizations and stereotypes about the Mexican have been circulated in the United States for over 124 years. Adjectives such as "treacherous," "lazy," "adulterous," and terms such as "meskin," or "greaser," have become synonymous with "Mexican" in the minds of many Anglo-Americans. Little has been done to expose the false premises on which such cultural and racial slurs have been based. Incomplete or biased analyses by historians have perpetuated factual errors and created myths. The Anglo-American public has believed and encouraged the historian's and social commentator's portrayal of the Mexican as "the enemy." The tragedy is that the myths have degraded the Mexican people—not only in the eyes of those who feel superior, but also in their own eyes.

Many of these myths have their foundation in the nineteenth century, when Anglo-Americans began infiltrating into the Mexican territory of Texas. They were nurtured by the accounts these Anglos gave of their Mexican neighbors, by the clash between Anglos and Mexicans in the Texas revolt of 1836, and by the Mexican-American War that erupted in 1846. Anglo-American historians glorified and justified the deeds of the "heroic" men who "won the West"—at the expense of the Mexicans, who were fighting to preserve their homeland. The Mexican became the outsider, and his subordinate status in the United States after 1848 was explained as the inevitable result of a clash between dynamic, industrious Anglo-Americans and apathetic, culturally deprived Mexicans.

These are myths that must be challenged—not only for the sake of historical accuracy, but for another, and even more crucial, reason. Mexicans—Chicanos—in the United States today are an oppressed people. They are citizens, but their citizenship is second-class at best. They are exploited and manipulated by those with more power. And, sadly, many believe that the only way to get along in Anglo-America is to become "Americanized" themselves. Awareness of their history—of their contributions and struggles, of the fact that they were not the "treacherous enemy" that Anglo-American histories have said they were—can restore pride and a sense of heritage to a people who have been oppressed for so long. In short, awareness can help them to liberate themselves.

It would be impossible in the space of one volume to refute the assumptions and historical inaccuracies of 124 years of Southwest history. This text, then, is not an attempt at a definitive history of the Chicano and his struggle toward liberation. Rather, I have attempted to underscore my thesis that Chicanos are a colonized people in the United States through the use of both...
public records and secondary sources. The result, I hope, is a clear alternative to traditional explanations offered by historians. But even more, I hope that the story of occupied America, and its thematic approach to Anglo imperialism, will spur Third World historians to take on the monumental task of primary research that still needs to be done in relation to the Southwest and the Chicano. Then, and perhaps much more effectively than I have done, they can challenge the conclusions of other historians.

Before focusing on my thesis of the colonization of the Chicano, I would like to clarify some points. First, the title of this monograph might appear to be a misnomer. Many readers will argue that Occupied Mexico would have been more appropriate since the monograph is about the occupation of an area formerly belonging to Mexico. While this argument is valid, I feel that Occupied America is more precise, for "America" is the identification that Europeans gave to two continents. When the name was later appropriated by thirteen colonies, the designation "America" was deemed the exclusive province of the new nation, and United States citizens considered themselves the "Americans." Chicanos, as well as other peoples, have often confounded and exculpate that all inhabitants—on both north and south continents—are Americans and that the whole hemisphere is indeed America. Thus, I hold that Anglo control of Mexico's northwest territory is an occupation of a part of the American hemisphere.

Although some readers might consider it a trivial matter, I feel compelled to distinguish between United States Americans and other Americans. Thus, in referring to people of the United States, I have used the term Anglo-American, or simply Anglo (derived from Anglo-Saxon), to underline the distinction. Similarly, I refer to U.S. settlements in Texas as Anglo-Texan (Anglo-Texans), in contrast to the native Texas population, which was Indian and Mexican.

Second, some U.S. citizens of Mexican extraction might object to the identification of "Chicano" in the title, for many call themselves simply Mexicanos or Mexicans. Moreover, a minority refer to themselves as Spanish-Americans or Latin Americans. Recently, the label Mexican-American has become popular, following the hyphenization tradition of other ethnic groups. Anglo-Americans have promoted the use of this label, and for a time it seemed as if it would be universally accepted. But within the last four years, activists have begun to question this identification. At first, some just dropped the hyphen and symbolically broke with the Americanization tradition. Others sought to identify themselves with a name of their own choice. They selected the term Chicano, which had often been used to designate lower-class Mexicans. Even though it had negative connotations for the middle class, activists considered that it was a symbol of resistance as well as a demand for self-determination. Such self-identification is, I believe, a necessary step in the process of awareness by which Chicanos can liberate themselves collectively.

In this work, I often use the terms Mexican and Chicano interchangeably. Mexican is used more in the first part of the book in recognition of the fact that nineteenth-century Mexicans were a conquered people. In the second part, which deals with the twentieth century and the changing situation in the United States, Chicano is used to distinguish Mexicans living north of the border from those residing in Mexico.

Central to the thesis of this monograph is my contention that the conquest of the Southwest created a colonial situation in the traditional sense—with the Mexican land and population being controlled by an imperialistic United States. Further, I contend that this colonization—with variations—is still with us today. Thus, I refer to the colony, initially, in the traditional definition of the term, and later (taking into account the variations) as an internal colony.

From the Chicano perspective, it is obvious that these two types of colonies are reality. In discussions with non-Chicano friends, however, I have encountered considerable resistance. In fact, even colleagues sympathetic to the Chicano cause vehemently deny that Chicanos are—or have been—colonized. They admit the exploitation and discrimination, but they add that this has been the experience of most "Americans"—especially European and Asian immigrants and Black Americans. While I agree that exploitation and racism have victimized most out-groups in the United States, this does not preclude the reality of the colonial relationship between the Anglo-American privileged and the Chicano.

I feel that the parallels between the Chicanos' experience in the United States and the colonization of other Third World peoples are too similar to dismiss. Attendant to the definition of colonization are the following conditions:

1. The land of one people is invaded by people from another country, who later use military force to gain and maintain control.
2. The original inhabitants become subjects of the conquerors involuntarily.
3. The conquered have an alien culture and government imposed upon them.
4. The conquered become the victims of racism and cultural genocide and are relegated to a submerged status.
5. The conquered are rendered politically and economically powerless.
6. The conquerors feel they have a "mission" in occupying the area in question and believe that they have undeniable privileges by virtue of their conquest.

These points also apply to the relationship between Chicanos and Anglos in Mexico's northwest territory.

In the traditional historian's viewpoint, however, there are two differences that impede universal acceptance of the reality of Anglo-American colonialism in this area:

1. Geographically the land taken from Mexico bordered the United States rather than being an area distant from the "mother country." Too many historians have accepted—subconsciously, if not conveniently—the myth that the area was always intended to be an integral part of the United States. Instead of conceptualizing the conquered territory as northern Mexico, they perceive it in terms of the "American" Southwest. Further, the stereotype of the colonialist pictures him wearing Wellington boots and carrying a swagger stick, and that stereotype is usually associated with overseas
situations—certainly not in territory contiguous to an “expanding” country. Historians also believe that the Southwest was won in fair and just warfare, as opposed to unjust imperialism.

The rationale has been that the land came to the United States as the result of competition, and in winning the game, the country was generous in paying for its prize. In the case of Texas, they believe Mexico attacked the “freedom-loving” Anglo-Americans. It is difficult for citizens of the United States to accept the fact that their nation has been and is imperialistic. Imperialism, to them, is an affront to other countries.

While I acknowledge the geographical proximity of the area—and the fact that this is a modification of the strict definition of colonialism—I refuse the conclusion that the Texan and Mexican-American wars were just or that Mexico provoked them. Further, I illustrate in this monograph that the conditions attendant to colonialism, listed above, accompanied the U.S. take-over of the Southwest. For these reasons, I maintain that colonialism in the traditional sense did exist in the Southwest, and that the conquerors dominated and exploited the conquered.

The colonization still exists today, but as I mentioned before, there are variations. Anglo-Americans still exploit and manipulate Mexicans and still relegate them to a submerged caste. Mexicans are still denied political and economic determination and are still the victims of racial stereotypes and racial slurs promulgated by those who feel they are superior. Thus, I contend that Mexicans in the United States are still a colonized people, but now the colonization is internal—it is occurring within the country rather than being imposed by an external power. The territories of the Southwest are states within the United States, and theoretically permanent residents of Mexican extraction are U.S. citizens. Yet the rights of citizenship are too often circumvented or denied outright.

In reality, there is little difference between the Chicano’s status in the traditional colony of the nineteenth century and in the internal colony of the twentieth century. The relationship between Anglos and Chicanos remains the same—that of master-servant. The principal difference is that Mexicans in the traditional colony were indigenous to the conquered land. Now, while some are descendants of Mexicans living in the area before the conquest, large numbers are technically descendants of immigrants. After 1910, in fact, almost one-eighth of Mexico’s population migrated to the United States, largely as a result of the push-and-pull of economic necessity. Southwest agribusinessmen “imported” Mexican workers to fill the need for cheap labor, and this influx signaled the beginning of even greater Anglo manipulation of Mexican settlements or colonias.

The original colonias expanded in size with increased immigration and new settlements sprang up. They became nations within a nation, in effect, for psychologically, socially, and culturally they remained Mexican. But the colonias had little or no control over their political, economic, or educational destinies. In almost every case, they remained separate and unequal to Anglo-American communities. The elected representatives within the colonias were usually Anglo-Americans or Mexicans under their control, and they established a bureaucracy to control the political life of the Mexican settlements—for the benefit of the Anglo privileged.

Further, Anglos controlled the educational system—they administered the schools and taught in the classrooms, and designed the curriculum not to meet the needs of Chicano students but to Americanize them. The police patrolling the colonias lived for the most part, outside the area. Their major purpose was to protect Anglo property. Anglos owned the business and industry in the colonias, and capital that could have been used to improve the economic situation within the colonias was taken into Anglo-American sectors, in much the same way that capital is drained from underdeveloped countries by foreign economic imperialists. In addition, the colonias became employment centers for industrialists, who were assured of a ready supply of cheap labor.

This pattern is one that emerged in most Chicano communities, and one that contradicts the belief in Anglo-American equality. In sum, even though the 1960 census documented that 85 percent of Chicanos are native-born U.S. citizens, most Anglo-Americans still considered them Mexicans and outsiders.

In discussing the traditional and internal colonization of the Chicano, it is not my intention to rekindle hatreds, nor to condemn all Anglo-Americans collectively for the ignominies that the Mexican in the United States has suffered. Rather, my purpose is to bring about an awareness—among both Anglo-Americans and Chicanos—of the forces that control and manipulate seven million people in this country and keep them colonized. If Chicanos can become aware of why they are oppressed and how the exploitation is perpetuated, they can work more effectively toward ending their colonization.

I realize that the initial stages of such awareness might result in intolerance among some Chicanos. However, I caution the reader that this work does not create a rationale for brown power just because it condemns the injustices of Anglo power. Extended visits in Mexico have taught me that Chicanos power is no better than any other power. Those who seek power are deprived of their humanity to the point that they themselves become the oppressors. Paulo Freire has written:

The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is]: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rage by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressor or themselves. Only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free you.

It is my hope that Occupied America can help us perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions of the power that has enabled Anglo-American colonizers to dominate Chicanos—and that too often made Chicanos accept and, in some instances, support the domination. Awareness will help us take action against the forces that oppress not only Chicanos but the oppressor himself.