MODERN CHICANO WRITERS

A Collection of Critical Essays Edited by JOSEPH SOMMERS and TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO



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Introduction

by Joseph Sommers and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto

This volume treats the literature of a people whose presence and role on the cultural stage of the United States have often been denied and certainly never recognized adequately. Numerical estimates of the Mexican—descended population in our country vary: the figure of ten million is a moderate projection. What is certain is that for several decades, Mexican Americans have been the most rapidly growing minority in the nation, a fact which is explained not only by internal demographic growth, but also by the constant arrival (Texas Rangers and border immigration agents not-withstanding) of new immigrants. Thus Chicano culture is subject to constant modification thanks to the contribution of these successive bearers of innovative language and of dynamic folk cultural traditions. Not the least of their traditions is literary expression, usually transmitted orally in its several generic variants: poetic, dramatic, and narrative.

Chicano literature is not, however, merely a reflection of modern demographic patterns or recent socio-political movements. Its history begins in 1848, when the consequences of an expansionist war dictated that tens of thousands of Mexicans should become U.S. citizens. Through the remainder of the nineteenth century, as railroads, mines, and urban areas were developed in the Southwest, and continuing through the twentieth century, when the turmoil and violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) uprooted vast sectors of society in the mother country (one million Mexicans died!), this Mexican-descended population in the United States grew steadily and extended its cultural roots ever more deeply into North American soil.

Our fundamental assumption in making this collection is that Chicano literature is a form of cultural expression by a people who have survived and grown through responding to conditions of domination. The literary consequences of these conditions have been crucial. One is a lack of access to education and a resulting cultural emphasis on oral expression and transmission rather than print. A second is the conception of literature as a local or regional phenomenon. Yet another consequence lies in the series of issues associated with language. To write in Spanish, say, at the turn of the century in Texas was to retain contact and closeness to one's community, because publication would be limited to local newspapers or regionally distributed

journals. To write in English, on the other hand, required erasing from one's literary discourse shadings of localism or colloquialism, and adjusting one's thematic lens to the narrow range of perception of the predominantly Anglo-middle-class audiences who constituted the readership of the few journals willing to publish the writings of Mexican-descended authors.

Accordingly, we have tried to serve two purposes in planning the colection. To begin with, we hope to introduce Chicano literature to a broad readership. We have addressed the book simultaneously to students and teachers of Chicano literature; to critics and teachers involved with the cultural expression of other minority groups, particularly Afro-American and Puerto Rican literatures; and to members of the academic community whose interests center on the mainstream of American literature, many of whom have explicitly voiced the desire for better access to Chicano literature in order better to define the nature and scope of American literature as a whole. Our second purpose is to provide a stimulus and challenge to literary critics both in academia and in the Chicano community itself. For while literary texts have been generated and circulated for more than a century, critical evaluation and response are only now becoming defined. By way of making that stimulus real, we have commissioned eleven articles expressly for this volume. Thus our contributors include not only recognized senior scholars such as Américo Paredes, Luis Leal, and Felipe Ortego, but also younger critics at the threshold of their careers, such as Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Ralph Grajeda, and Marta Sánchez.

Our own critical outlook, as reflected in the choices, omissions, and emphases we have made, is, of course, partisan. We have consciously highlighted certain qualities, while attempting to avoid what we consider misapprehensions. It has been our aim, for example, to stress implicitly and explicitly that Chicano literature has a history. While many of the critical studies we present focus on modern works, we have tried to show that a perspective indispensable to full critical understanding is the historic process of cultural continuity and change. This dimension is present in the "framing" articles by Luis Leal and Joseph Sommers, and in the introductions to each of the three generically organized sections, by Juan Rodríguez, Felipe Ortego, and Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer.

Similarly, we have wished to demonstrate the important links between popular oral expression and print culture, suggesting that even the most developed and polished literary text, whether a personal poem by Tino Villanueva, a Rulfo-like passage from Tomás Rivera, or an allegorical scene from the Teatro Campesino, is understood more clearly when seen against its sub-surface of popular experience, language, and culture. In one way or other, consciousness of these links underlies the framing articles by Américo Paredes and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, as well as the studies by Ralph Grajeda, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, and Marta Sánchez.

Language problems have also received our attention. The nature of bilingualism and the relation between language and class are treated from

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different angles by Américo Paredes, Rosaura Sánchez, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, and Orlando Trujillo. On a practical level, we have presented some Spanish quotations in translation, rendered some texts in English alongside the Spanish originals, and left still others with their bilingual qualities intact. Further, the work of able women has been sought out, and the volume is enriched by contributions from Rosaura Sánchez, Marta Sánchez, Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano. In our opinion, the article by Marta Sánchez on two largely unstudied poets, Judy Lucero and Bernice Zamora, will stimulate a number of potential studies now in various stages of elaboration.

With these as our positive emphases, we have been at pains to clear up old misapprehensions and avoid disseminating new ones. For example, we have tried to make it obvious that Chicano literature is not "newly emerged." We have questioned the desirability of assimilating Chicano literature into traditional American literature. We have been careful not to adjust our texts and evaluations to the usual criteria of the Anglo-middle-class reader, and not to accept uncritically the many cultural and racial stereotypes which have sprung from the asymmetrical relationships between Anglo-America and Mexican America.

While recognizing that Chicano literature has roots in both Mexican and Anglo-American literatures, we have tried to imply that its own cultural sources and development patterns are identical with neither. A careful reader of this volume will, we think, be convinced of the need to amplify or reinterpret the categories conventionally applied in Anglo-American literary history. Terms such as "romanticism," "frontier epic," "alienation," or "national consciousness" demand special handling if they are to be applied at all to the interpretation of Chicano texts. So do concepts derived from Mexican literary and cultural criticism like "neo-realism," "hermeticism," "the dialectics of solitude," peladismo, malinchismo.

On the other hand, it has seemed to us neither possible nor desirable to attempt to prescribe a canon. The criticism of Chicano literature (in comparison with the quality of the literature itself) is still underdeveloped, and much critical trial and error will be needed to raise even the right questions. For this reason, we have devoted the first section to the conceptual terrain underlying literary criticism: popular culture, literary history, sociolinguistics, culture theory, critical theory. To the same end, we have included articles and formulations which contrast with or criticize each other. The introductions by Juan Rodríguez and Felipe Ortego, for example, are based on contrasting assumptions about literary history. The articles by Joseph Sommers and Juan Bruce-Novoa are at odds in their premises about the nature and function of literary criticism. And the studies by Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano represent differing evaluative approaches to the Teatro Campesino. It is our hope that this volume illustrates dialectical criticism at its best and that from contrasts, differences, and debates will come clarification and higher levels of analysis.

The Folk Base of Chicano Literature

by Américo Paredes

I

In the Forties, around the time of the Second World War, a folk-inspired Mexican song was very popular. It went like this:

Como México no hay dos No hay dos en el mundo entero Ni sol que brille mejor Como México no hay dos. There are no two like Mexico There aren't two in the whole world Nor a sun that shines brighter... There are no two like Mexico.

And some Mexicans would observe with a characteristic irony, "iGracias a Dios!" ("Thank God.")

Both the author of the song and those who commented on it were mistaken, since it is well known that there are in fact two Mexicos. Every Mexican knows that there are two Mexicos, just as he knows that there being two is not a purely metaphysical concept, although it has its transcendental implications. The concept of two Mexicos refers to facts to be understood in the world of things. One Mexico—the "real" one, in the Platonic as well as in the ordinary sense—is found within the boundaries of the Mexican Republic. The second Mexico—the "México de Afuera," (Mexico abroad) as Mexicans call it—is composed of all the persons of Mexican origin in the United States. My present theme is the folk culture of this "México de Afuera," as manifested in folklore.

Mexican folklore and that of "México de Afuera" are commonly thought of as two related but distinct entities. There is no general agreement, however, about the differences which exist between the two. Scholars have distinguished Mexican from Mexican-American folklore in at least three ways. I will call these 1) the Hispanophile, 2) the diffusionist, and 3) the regionalist views. To express the first view in its extreme form, we would have to stress the pronounced differences between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans from Mexico. Mexican-American folklore, we would say, is almost totally Spanish—Peninsular, in other words—in its origins, having come

[&]quot;The Folk Base of Chicano Literature" (editor's title), by Américo Paredes. This essay appeared in more extensive form as "El folklore de los grupos de origen mexicano en Estados Unidos" in Folklore Americano (Lima, Peru), 14:14 (1964), 146-63. The translation is by Kathleen Lamb. Reprinted by permission of the author.

directly from Spain to the parts of the United States where it is found today. It has no more than a remote likeness to the folklore found south of the border between the United States and Mexico, since the latter is mixed with indigenous elements which have diluted its grace and elegance.

A less extreme Hispanophile view is based on chronology. While folklore of Spanish origin in the United States, we are told, has its sources in colonial Mexico, this folklore reached the Southwestern United States long ago, when Mexico was New Spain, centuries before modern Mexico was formed. The Spanish folklore of the United States is thus superior to that of Mexico, not only because it is *criollo* (Spanish-American) with impectable colonial credentials, but also because it represents survivals of ancient and valuable European forms. Adapting two terms well known in *Romancero* (ballad) Studies, the Spanish folklore of the United States is considered antiguo while the folklore of Mexico is simply vulgar.

The Hispanophile view does not appear in its extreme form in the work of any serious folklorist, though it is found in that of many amateur collectors, commentators and novelists of the Far West. Interested persons can find all the necessary examples in the work of Cecil Robinson, With the Ears of Strangers. This attitude is based on a racial snobbery of which no nation on earth is completely free, but which reached one of its high points in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The less extreme form of Hispanicism, which relies on chronology, has in fact influenced serious studies of Mexican-American folklore. It is the tacit assumption on which the first studies of Mexican folklore were made in the United States, especially those in New Mexico. The renowned scholar Aurelio M. Espinosa, for instance, made admirable discoveries of remnants of Spanish folklore in the Southwestern United States, but in general he was rarely concerned with the purely Mexican elements, which were decidedly in the majority-or if he did collect them, very seldom did he recognize them as Mexican. Among his materials were Mexican corridos of very recent creation, and of undoubted Mexican origin, like "De Ignacio Parra," yet he did not recognize them as Mexican because he was convinced of the purely Hispanic character of New Mexican folklore.2 His prestige, in fact, made a sort of dogma of the supposed Peninsular origins of New Mexican folklore. For this reason, when in 1933 Arthur L. Campa affirmed its basically Mexican character, his observations seemed almost revolutionary, though they merely indicated what was evident to those who wished to see.3

The second way of interpreting Mexican-American folklore-which we

¹Cecil Robinson, With the Ears of Strangers: The Mexican in American Literature (Tucson, Arizona, 1963).

²See for example Espinosa's "Romancero nuevomejicano" in *Revue Hispanique* XXXIII: 84 (1915) 446-560; XL: 97 (1917) 215-217; XLI: 100 (1917) 687-680.

³Arthur L. Campa, "The Spanish Folksong in the Southwest," University of New Mexico Bulletin IV: 1 (1933) 7-8, 13, 32-33, 54-56, 66.

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call diffusionist—sees it as a slight isolated ripple, moving far from its origin in the great waves of Mexican folk culture centered in Jalisco, land of the *machos*. There is no need to insist on the attractions of this view for any Mexican folklorist. The converse of the Hispanophile opinion, it regards Mexican-American folklore as in no way different, original, or important, since it is merely a collection of decayed chips scattered far from the trunk. We might perhaps find a few variants of texts well-known in Mexico, variants which would serve as footnotes to Mexican folklore. That would be about all. Most native Mexican folklorists have viewed Mexican-American folklore in this way, as the detritus of Mexican folklore, when they have taken it into account at all

Mexican-American and Mexican folklore can also be differentiated by considering the former a "regional folklore" and the latter a "national folklore." A regional folklore tradition in the United States is defined as the offshoot of some distant trunk of national folklore, which has put down deep roots in North American soil and developed characteristics of its own. The members of a regional folk culture, according to Richard M. Dorson in American Folklore:

are wedded to the land and the land holds memories. The people themselves possess identity and ancestry through continuous occupation of the same soil.⁴

In his survey of United States regional folklore in *Buying the Wind*, Dorson includes Mexican-American folklore among regional folklores like those of the Pennsylvania Dutch and the Cajuns of Louisiana, thus giving Mexican-American folklore an identity of its own.⁵ This is the point of view, naturally enough, of the modern North American folklorist who is interested in identifying the various threads making up the complex fabric of North American culture.

None of these three ways of seeing Mexican-American folklore is completely wrong. If we are looking for survivals, we must admit that the Mexican folk culture of the United States is often more conservative than that of Mexico, and retains folkloristic data originally from Spain which seem to have disappeared in Mexico. The ballad "La bella dama y el pastor" is an example. Apparently Mexican folklorists have been unable to collect it in their country, although it is well known both in New Mexico and southern Texas.⁶ No serious folklorist nowadays would doubt, however, that "La bella dama y el pastor" reached the Southwestern United States from Mexico, in line with the most classic diffusionist principles, or that the groups of Spanish-speaking people in those areas are strictly Mexican in

⁴Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore (Chicago, 1959) p. 75.

⁵Richard M. Dorson, Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States (Chicago, 1964) 415-95.

⁶I should mention that I have collected versions of this ballad within the boundaries of Mexico, in the city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas. But Tamaulipas is the old province of Nuevo Santander, together with southern Texas.

origin and culture.⁷ Neither is it wrong to refer to the cultures of these groups as "regional cultures." They are Mexican-Americans who have been established for centuries in the regions where they live, and far from being "immigrants" themselves, can view the North American as the immigrant.

H

But this is not the whole story. The attention of folklorists has been limited almost exclusively so far to regional groups, that is, to groups established for generations in certain parts of the Southwest. Only a minority of the Mexicans in the United States, however, live within these groups. If we consider Mexican-Americans folklore as a totality, we find other kinds of groups besides regional ones. We also find evidence of a series of exchanges between endemic Mexican folklore and that of the "México de Afuera," a continuous mutual influence moving in both directions which is not typical of other regional cultures in the United States. This is the result of a simple geographical fact: the Atlantic Ocean divides Pennsylvania from Germany, and Louisiana from France, but only an imaginary line divides "México de Adentro" (Mexico as a territorial unit) from "México de Afuera." This line is easy to cross, legally or illegally.

At least three kinds of folklore groups of Mexican origin can be found in the United States. First, there are the truly regional groups; second, the groups composed of rural or semirural immigrants; and third, the urban groups. The first, as we have said, are composed of descendants of the early settlers on the northern frontiers of New Spain. At present, they are found in only two areas. One, more or less equivalent to the former province of Nuevo México, includes the present state of New Mexico, West Texas, parts of Arizona and Colorado, and the Mexican state of Chihuahua. The second area, corresponding to the former province of Nuevo Santander, is comprised of southern Texas, from the Nueces River to the Río Grande, the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and nearby areas of Coahuila and Nuevo León. Two similar regions existed in California and the former province of Texas, but it has been some time since they sustained Mexican-American folk cultures of the regional type. After 1849, Mexican settlements in California were engulfed in the wave of North American immigration caused by the discovery of gold, so that only traces remain of californio traditions. The Mexicans who lived in the province of Texasthe region east and north of the Río Nueces-were almost all driven from their homes after Texas gained independence in 1836. Only in the areas which earlier formed part of the provinces of Nuevo México and Nuevo Santander have Mexican-American folk groups of the regional type sur-

 $^{^7\}mathrm{Of}$ course I am not referring to recently immigrated groups like the Basques and the Sephardic Jews.

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vived. In those areas, folklore materials from Spain and Mexico have been kept alive for many generations, and local adaptations have been made as well. These two regions are well known to folklorists. What is often not known is that their limits are not defined by the Customs and Immigration offices at the border. Parts of northern Mexico are included within the boundaries of each. These regional folk cultures thus include regions of two nations.

The folk groups composed of rural or semi-rural immigrants are formed to a large extent by braceros (migrant workers) from the interior of Mexico, who began to enter the United States in growing numbers at the turn of the century. In Border areas they frequently displaced the day laborers born and brought up in those areas, who were forced to emigrate to the northern United States. In successive waves, braceros from southern Mexico established themselves among the regional groups, reoccupied formerly Mexican areas of California and Texas, and penetrated into parts of the United States to which Mexican culture had not extended before. Since they are almost all agricultural workers they have congregated in farming communities, where they constitute a pool of badly paid labor. Their folklore has much in common with that of the regional groups, but it is enriched by material recently brought from the interior of Mexico. For example, the water spirit which haunted the shores of the Papaloapan in Veracruz now appears by the banks of the Río Grande in Texas, or the Colorado in Arizona.

The third type of Mexican-American folk group (the urban) is found in the *Mexiquitos* of North American cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and San Antonio. Some members of these urban groups come from the regional groups, displaced by *braceros* migrating from Mexico. Others are enterprising ex-*braceros* who came to work in the fields and stayed on as employees in the factories of the big cities. Children and grandchildren of political refugees who left Mexico during the Revolution are also almost always found in cities. The folklore of these urban groups comes, for the most part, from the regional groups and from the immigrant farm workers, although it has been adapted to the needs of life in the city. A marked emphasis is given to such forms as the *caló* (dialect), the *albur* (word play), the *blazon populaire*, and to the *chascarrillo* (joke) known to all the ethnic groups of the city.

Of the three groups, those least affected by the process of transculturation are the immigrant field workers; it would be difficult to decide which of the other two—the urban or the regional—has experienced a greater degree of transculturation, since both types are bilingual in varying degrees. The member of the urban groups is more subject to external influences, and is thus also the object of greater hostility, caused by the pressures and complexities of urban life. As a result, he feels less at ease in his

environment than the member of the regional group. The latter, in turn, while his regional consciousness may permit a more favorable synthesis, finds himself more isolated from North American cultural traditions. These three folk groups which make up "México de Afuera" are constantly influencing one another at the same time that they are the object of all sorts of influences from Mexico as well as from the United States. They also exercise a certain influence in both Mexico and the United States. Mexican folklore, that is, like the concept of a "México de Afuera," knows no borders.

III

The first Mexicans to become permanent residents of the United States—with the exceptions of a few political refugees—were the inhabitants of the Mexican territories ceded to the United States in 1848. This was the origin of the regional folk-groups, and these were the first Mexican-Americans - the majority of them very much against their will. They were at once involved in a long-drawn-out struggle with the North Americans and their culture. Cultural differences were aggravated by the opportunism of many North American adventurers, who in their desire for riches treated the new citizens from the start as a conquered people. Names like Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, Aniceto Pizaña, Gregorio Cortez and Elfego Baca – all men who, as a corrido (narrative folk song) puts it "defendieron su derecho" ("defended their right")—were immortalized in songs and legends. This was the birth ten years after the war between Mexico and the United States—of the first examples of Mexican-American folklore. Some of these rebels against the government of the United States were killed or taken prisoner by the North American authorities, who naturally treated them as bandits and law-breakers. Others escaped to Mexico, where they lived out their lives as symbols of Anglo-American injustice.

If we look at the history of Mexico from a general point of view, Mexican nationalist feeling does not define itself until the last third of the Nineteenth Century and owes a great deal to the French occupation during the reign of Maximilian of Austria. In the northern frontiers, however, and in the parts of the United States recently taken from Mexico, nationalism begins to be felt toward the end of the 1830s, if we may take the folklore of those regions as an indication. It is a blaze stirred up by the daily conflict between the quietism of the Mexican and the power, the aggressiveness, and the foreign culture of the Anglo-American. On the one hand, this conflict was expressed almost immediately in folkloric data, in *corridos* and other songs, semi-historical legends, insulting labels for North Americans. On the other hand, these folk artifacts reinforced psychological attitudes

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toward the United States and helped to isolate the regional groups, making them more typically "folk" than ever.

The Mexican saw himself and all that he stood for as continually challenging a foreign people who treated him, for the most part, with disdain. Being Mexican meant remaining inviolable in the face of overwhelming attack on one's personality. Under those circumstances, for a Mexican to accept North American values was to desert under fire. Such a situation—creative of folk groups defined as minorities—is not historically unique. It has been repeated many times with other peoples whose identity has been menaced. Among people within their own borders—the Poles, let us say, the Finns, the Irish or the Greeks—such a situation has created an intensified nationalism. In contrast, other peoples who have existed as minorities within a dominant group—the Jews in Europe, for example—have maintained their identity through very close cultural bonds. The Border Mexican-American, because of his special relationship to the United States, made use of both these solutions.

It is not until 1890 that the immigration of new Mexican elements to the United States really begins, as part of a reciprocal movement: at the same time that North American capital invades Mexico, the Mexican bracero invades the United States. The cause is the same: the expansion in industry and finance which occurred in the United States in the decades after the Civil War (1861-1865). By 1890 North American capital was strong enough to look for foreign investments, and the government of Porfirio Díaz welcomed it to Mexico. It was around this time that the Díaz government became oppressive. The exploitation of the nation's natural resources by foreign capital worsened the already miserable situation of the Mexican peasant.

Migrant work was nothing new to the field worker from the interior of Mexico, but now he began to extend his trips from the states neighboring his own to the northern part of the country, and finally across the border. In the United States everything was ready to welcome him. The Civil War had initiated a shift in population from rural areas to the city, at the same time that the nation's total population increased, causing a greater demand for agricultural products. European immigrants were arriving in great numbers, but they remained in the big cities as factory workers, or if they turned to agriculture it was in the northern part of the country. There were harvests to reap and railroad tracks to lay in the South and the Southeast. This demand was met by the bracero. Braceros immigrated to Texas at first, and to other Border regions, but with time they moved farther and farther north-to the railroads of West Virginia and Pennsylvania, to the sugar beet fields in Michigan, and finally, to the factories of the Great Lakes. According to the Twelfth Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. in 1908 there were 71,000 Mexican immigrants in Texas alone; in 1920 there were a quarter million. In 1910, 2% of all the immigration to the United States was from Mexico: in 1920 it was 12%.

IV

The Mexican bracero in the United States became a more or less permanent source of labor—and a minority made up of immigrants in a situation little superior to that of the former slaves, with whom they competed for work. The great antagonism between Blacks and Mexicans which resulted was often the cause of violence between the two groups. Also the Mexican bracero was identified with the Black in the mind of the Anglo-American. In this way racial prejudices were added to prejudices based on linguistic differences and other cultural factors, resulting in exclusion from restaurants, beaches, and theatres, and segregation in special schools. As the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States grew, these discriminatory practices increased as well, including lynchings of Mexicans accused of raping North American women.

Treatment of the bracero has varied with the use which could be made of him, and the Immigration Laws have been applied at the convenience of the American farmers who hired him. In times when labor has been in short supply he has been well received. When the need for him was not so great, efforts were made to prevent his passage from Mexico to the United States, not only by legal means but also by intimidation and insults from Customs and Immigration agents. In times of economic depression, he has been suddenly deported and forced to abandon family ties formed during a stay of twenty or more years in the United States. In fairness, we must note that the Mexican immigrant's sense of continuing to "pass through" after twenty years or more of residence in the United States contributed to his problems, since he remained a perennial visitor in a foreign country, without exercising the rights and the duties of citizenship. And he brought up his children born in the United States in his own way of thinking. Here we see an extension of the concept of a "México de Afuera" already described in discussing the regional groups.

A brief mention of the urban groups remains to be made. Of course Mexicans have always lived in North American cities like San Antonio, where the Mexican element has been present since Texas was part of Mexico. But we do not find really large groups or "colonies" of Mexicans in the cities of the United States until the Mexican Revolution, that is from 1911 on. With the Revolution comes another type of Mexican immigrant: the refugee from fratricidal wars and the political exile, among whom were many of Mexico's intellectuals. These people naturally went to the cities—to suffer all the anxieties of exile in an environment hardly noted for its sympathy with the Mexican and his culture. These exiled intellectuals lost no time in becoming the leaders and models in the "Mexican colonies" of the big cities, so effectively that some cities like San Antonio and Los Angeles became Mexican cultural centers in exile for a time. But these "colonies" were not composed only of exiles; they also included many other Mexicans who had come to the United States not in flight from the Revolution, but in