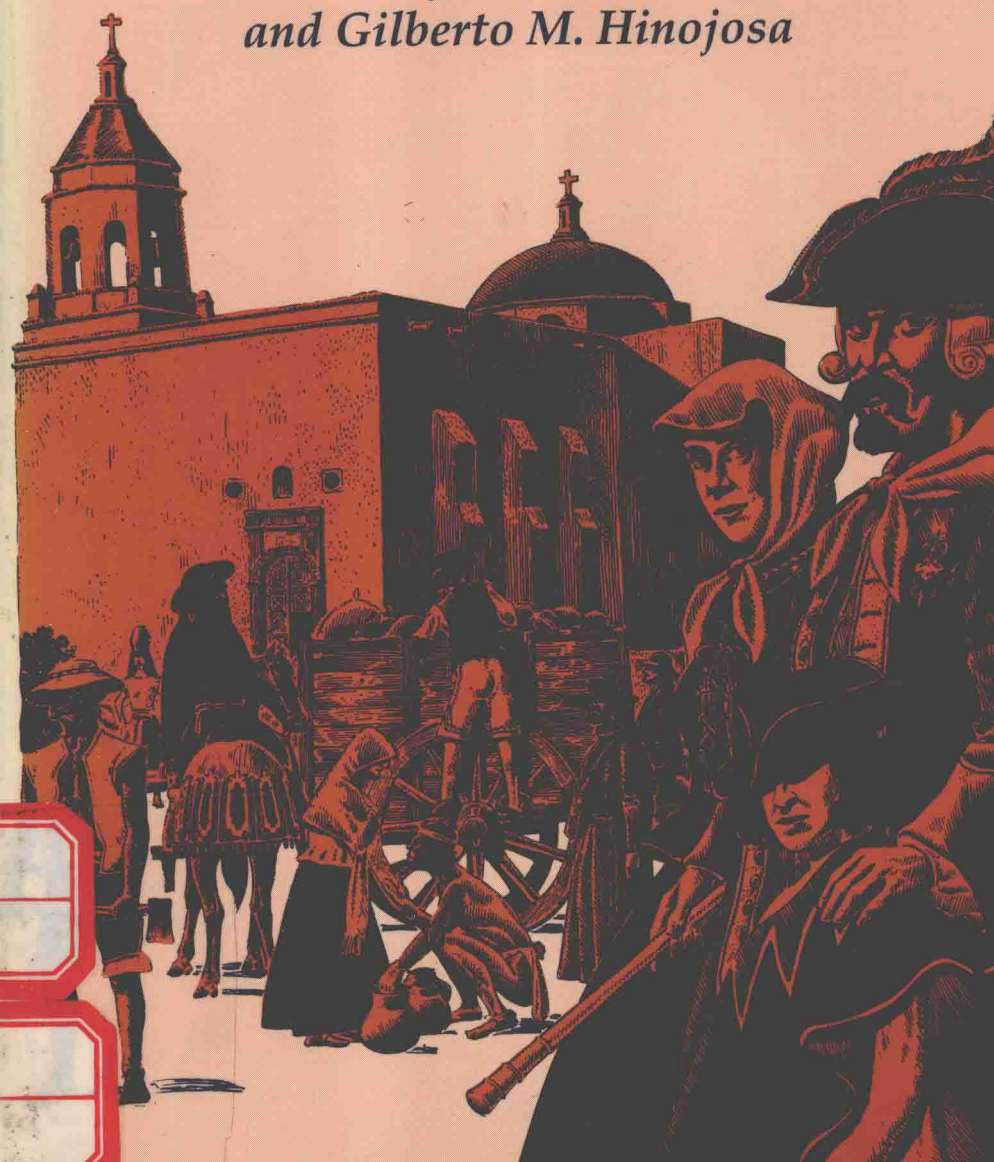


Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio

*Edited by Gerald E. Poyo
and Gilberto M. Hinojosa*



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Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa

Illustrated by José Cisneros

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*For the makers of colonial San Antonio, their historians,
and those who have kept alive the traditions
of Spanish and Mexican Texas*

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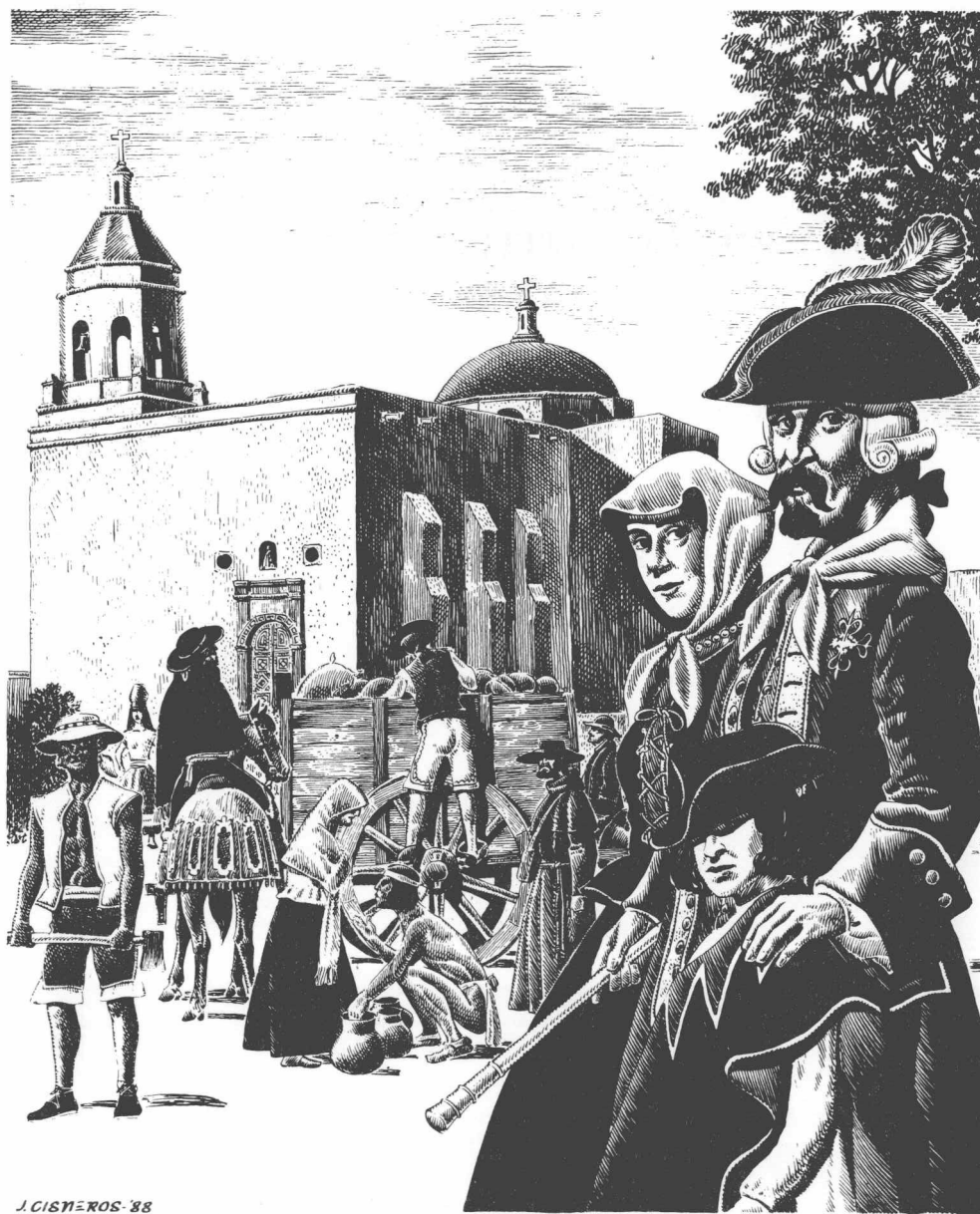
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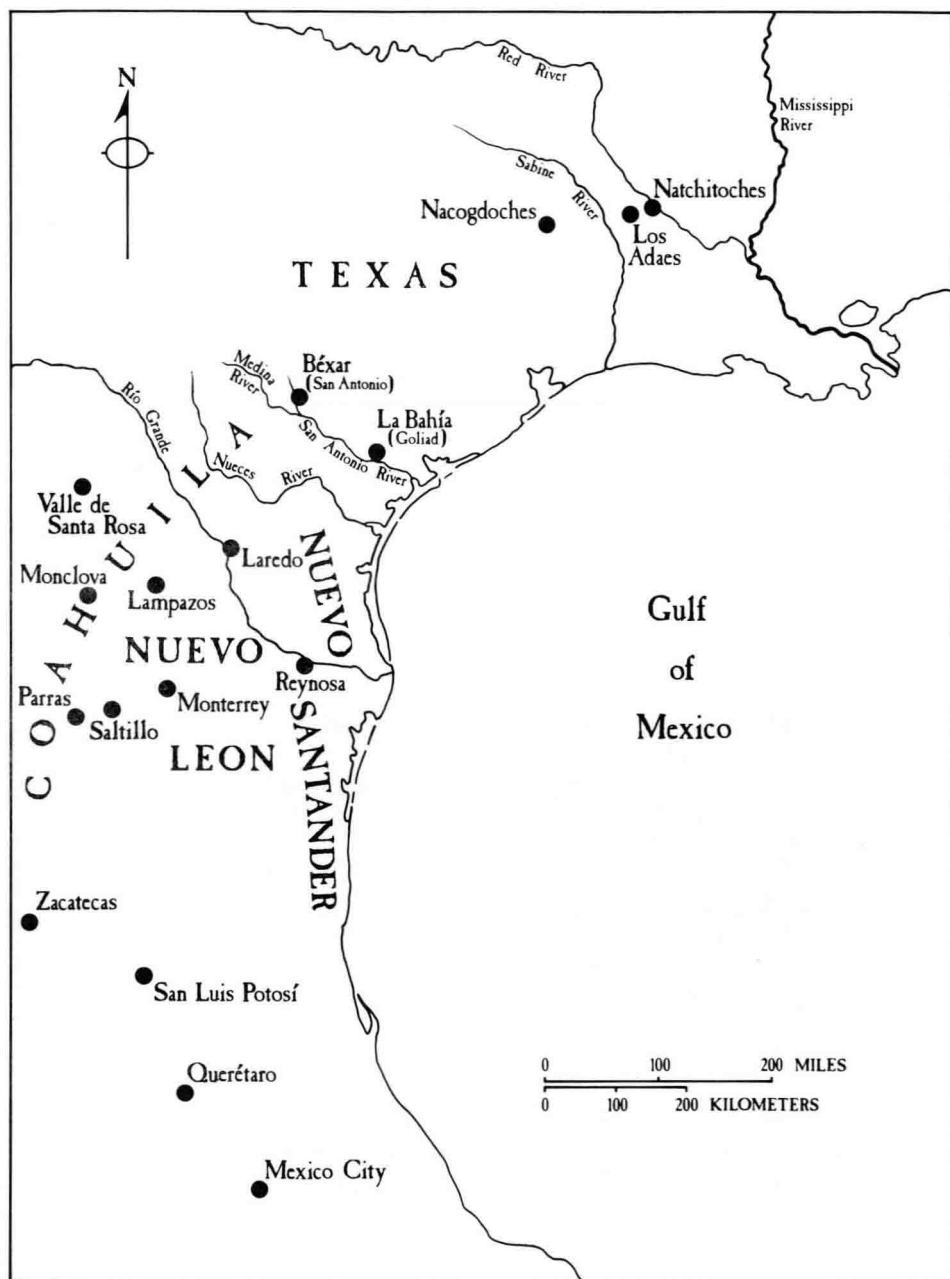
This book is evidence of the enthusiasm displayed during the last several years by many people interested in better understanding the relevance of the history of Spain and Mexico in the regions that now constitute the United States Southwest. In 1986 The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio (ITC) sought funding from the Texas Committee for the Humanities (TCH) for a symposium, exhibit, and book project focusing on community development and identity in a Spanish Borderlands region. A challenge grant from TCH was matched by the Kathryn O'Connor Foundation of Victoria, the City of San Antonio Arts and Cultural Affairs Office, and the Valero Energy Corporation.

These institutions made the project possible, but it was the enthusiastic support from San Antonio's community organizations which made the symposium a great success. The Canary Islands Descendants Association, the Bexareños, the Granaderos de Gálvez, and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center

all provided support of one kind or another, but, perhaps most significant, their members filled the symposium hall at ITC. They welcomed our speakers, who contributed excellent presentations and cooperated in preparing their papers for inclusion in this volume. Insightful and encouraging comments and criticisms by discussants Oakah T. Jones, Jr., and David Johnson gave direction to the revision process for publication. Although not part of the program, David J. Weber has consistently encouraged us in our work, and we would like to acknowledge his help here.

We also want to express special recognition to John Leal, Bexar County archivist, who over the years has, in his own quiet but consistent way, provided invaluable research guidance; to José Cisneros of El Paso for his drawings of eighteenth-century Béxar in this volume; and to the ITC volunteers who helped on numerous fronts, especially in processing much of the census data used in at least two of the articles.

The Institute of Texan Cultures itself should also be commended for its unflagging support of the project. To our knowledge, no other institution in the state has, in recent years, contributed as many resources to public programming and primary research on Spanish Texas as has the Institute. This volume reflects only a portion of that effort.



Northeastern New Spain

INTRODUCTION

The story of Texas can never be complete without the story of her original founders—the Tejanos," declared Andrew A. Tijerina, one of several Mexican-American historians who began tracing their communal roots two decades or so ago.¹ Since that time scholars have written considerably about Tejanos and their heritage. But synthesizing their history is a formidable task, for indeed, a cursory review of the history of Mexican settlers of Spanish-Indian-African ancestry who have resided in Texas since the early eighteenth century reveals a tremendous diversity of experience. Tejano history encompasses a chronological span of some 250 years. It crosses four sovereignties; involves the reorientation of many Coahuilan, Tamaulipan, and New Mexican communities to a Texas identity during the nineteenth century, and includes the birth of new communities established by Mexican immigrants, particularly in the twentieth century. Each of these experiences produced unique communal identities, but at the same time the various

communities shared a sense of separateness from the broader society that allows scholars to speak of a Tejano identity.

Though identity is a difficult concept to define, its expression ultimately comes from people in their communal settings. The clues about a people's identity are found in the internal economic, social, political, and cultural workings of their communities. Thus, the concepts of community and identity are intimately linked, and it is through the vehicle of community studies that scholars will eventually synthesize Tejano history. Such studies will reveal the diversity of Tejano history and will also point to the areas of commonality that have historically produced a shared sense of Tejano identity.²

The Historiography of Neglect

The task of interpreting Tejano history is still in its formative stage, since the field has suffered from a long tradition of scholarly neglect. Only in recent years have scholars begun to examine Tejano community history in some detail. This historic lack of concern for the enduring Tejano civilization is particularly disturbing in light of the prominent role Mexican settlers have played in the state's development since the early eighteenth century.

The pattern of neglect of Tejano communities is evident in Texas historiography as early as the eighteenth century. One of the first histories of Texas, penned in 1783 by Father Juan Agustín Morfi, paid scant attention to the workings of the civil communities. Revealing attitudes prevalent among Europeans of the day, Morfi implied that little could be expected from the inhabitants since they descended "from the lowest classes." He observed that "[the] population [of San Fernando de Béxar, the province's principal settlement] is made up of [Canary] islanders and families from the country [New Spain, who] . . . are indolent and given to vice, and do not deserve the blessings of the land." The work's tone leaves the impression that the province's civil communities were insignificant and that without the missions Hispanic civilization would never have taken root in Texas.³

Later Mexican authorities also offered critical judgments about Texas communities. One official, José María Sánchez, who accompanied General Manuel Mier y Terán on a visita in 1828, demonstrated scant sympathy for the hardships inherent in frontier life, particularly the difficulties imposed by Indian hostilities, demographic stagnation, and government-created economic limitations. Instead Sánchez blamed the slow economic progress in Texas on the laziness of the inhabitants, who, he claimed, spent their time on amusements. Not content with this blanket indictment, Sánchez even criticized the settlers for not speaking Spanish properly.⁴ Generations of historians relied on these generalizations and accepted the prejudiced judgments of the visiting Spanish and Mexican officials at face value.

This is particularly evident in the treatment of early Texas by Anglo-American historians, who contributed their own biased assumptions. These chroniclers depicted Spanish and Mexican communities as inconsequential and considered their contributions of little enduring value. In 1855 Henderson P. Yoakum described Tejano society as simple and unresourceful, explaining that in 1806 the population of San Antonio de Bxar "was made up of Spaniards, creoles, and a few French, Americans, civilized Indians, and half-breeds . . . [whose] habits were wandering, the most of them being engaged in hunting buffaloes and wild horses." Yoakum had little more to say about San Antonio society except that "the people, having no care of politics, passed their leisure time in playing at games, in dancing, and in conversing, mostly upon one of the subjects of money, women, or horses."⁵

Minimizing the contributions of Spanish and Mexican settlers in Texas served not only to justify the separation of the province from Mexico but also to deny their descendants full membership in post-1836 Texas society. Writing at the start of the twentieth century, Texas historian George P. Garrison failed even to acknowledge the existence of a Tejano society. "The Spanish explorers were daring, energetic, and persistent enough for any undertaking," he observed, "but the conquistador was

not backed up by the settler, and the officials could not organize a compact political and social system from native material alone." In sum, Garrison regarded Spain's "grasp" of the area "too weak for permanence."⁶ Even as recently as 1983, popular Texas historian T.R. Fehrenbach dismissed the Tejano experience as marginal to Texas history. Despite admitting that "Texas is far less homogeneous than its image," Fehrenbach concludes that "the roots of Modern Texas lie in the British Isles."⁷

Stirrings of Interest in Tejano History

Fortunately not all North American scholars accepted this fundamentally negative view of Hispanic influence on Texas. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some historians created a formal academic field of study known as the Spanish Borderlands. A host of scholars and history enthusiasts produced works that examined many aspects of Mexican-American society, including economics, politics, and folklore, though communities were not systematically analyzed. Despite some shortcomings, these studies drew academic and public attention to the origins and development of Hispanic society in Texas and created the foundation for a subsequent focus on Tejano communities.

The Spanish Borderlands scholars were the first to counteract the earlier neglect of Spain's role in Texas and the United States. Offering a competing interpretation of Hispanic traditions, they were determined to overturn the anti-Spanish, derogatory images and accounts set by earlier historians. To this end, Hubert Howe Bancroft, Herbert Eugene Bolton, Carlos E. Castañeda, Charles W. Hackett, Odie B. Faulk, and a score of others meticulously described the exploration and settlement of the former Spanish possessions. They produced a substantial and important literature on the northern frontier provinces, including Texas, and revived interest in the area's colonial past. But they were primarily interested in geopolitical questions and in the development of frontier institutions, and their cover-

age of the communities themselves was inadequate. Furthermore, with the notable exception of Castañeda, these scholars did not attempt to link the Spanish era into subsequent periods and processes.⁸

At the same time that these researchers published prodigiously on the colonial period, a number of scholars from a variety of other disciplines, journalists, and Mexican-American activists began to take a serious interest in the various aspects of the Tejano communities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the first was economist Paul S. Taylor, who, during the 1920s and 1930s, focused on Mexican and Mexican-American workers in the United States. Placed in a historical context and based on extensive interviewing, Taylor's analysis of Hispanic laboring communities in Nueces County remains a fundamental source for any consideration of the Tejano experience.⁹ Relying heavily on Taylor's work, journalist Carey McWilliams produced, some twenty years later, a widely used and influential overview of Mexican-American history that included the Tejano experience.¹⁰

Scholars interested in the cultural traditions of turn-of-the-century South Texans also contributed to the growing body of literature on Tejanos. Fascinated by Texas cowboy tradition and folklore, J. Frank Dobie turned to the vaqueros with whom he had grown up and uncovered a wealth of humanistic values and folkways that previous observers had not considered important enough to record. Dobie labored assiduously to capture the Mexican dimension of what appeared to him to be a passing era, and, despite a patronizing view, he inspired other folklorists and anthropologists to look beyond the Anglo-American traditions of the state.¹¹

In another field O. Douglas Weeks analyzed political behavior in counties along the Rio Grande in the early twentieth century. In studying the 1920s Weeks discovered that early Anglo-American leaders in the region adopted the political styles of many Tejano politicians. Armed with this understanding of Mexican influences on politics, subsequent scholars were

better prepared to study South Texas leadership and voting patterns. The result has been the emergence of an image of Tejanos as active participants in determining their destinies.¹²

Midcentury immigrant communities did not fare as positively under the scrutiny of sociologists. Following strictly the conventions of their field, these scholars produced "scientific" studies of Mexican-American communities in South Texas. While purporting to be objective, most of these sociologists in fact tacitly accepted the stereotypes of the day. They blamed conditions in the barrios on the "cultural deficiencies" of new immigrants rather than on economic conditions and realities. Furthermore, failing to note the social and political activism of the neighborhood residents, these sociologists depicted Tejanos as tradition-bound and passive.¹³ Despite a limited, culturally biased perspective, these scholars sought to capture the socioeconomic forces within the local community, an approach that others who viewed the Mexican-American experience more positively had not attempted.

Other history enthusiasts, anthropologists, and barrio activists did not accept the portrayal offered by sociologists of a passive Mexican-American community. Frederick C. Chabot, for example, researched the genealogical roots of the "makers" of San Antonio; local San Antonio community leader and attorney Rubén Rendón Lozano identified many of the Tejanos who took arms against Mexico during the Texas rebellion; historian and folklorist Jovita González studied the vibrant community life and folkways of South Texan Hispanics; and community activist Alonzo Perales defended Tejano heritage.¹⁴ These observers emphasized Hispanic contributions to the state and to the larger North American society from Spanish colonial days to their day.

An Emergent Tejano Community History

The pioneering Spanish Borderlands histories and the early studies of Mexican-American barrios provided a good foundation for a post-World War II explosion in research that led to the first specific analyses of Tejano communities. Utilizing

new methodologies of the social sciences and influenced by a rich body of historical research on Latin America, scholars produced numerous publications on a variety of issues and topics related to Tejanos.

Though not specifically focused on Tejano history, several works have provided useful methodological and contextual information within which to understand the birth and development of Tejano communities. Perhaps the most useful of these is a recent publication by Thomas D. Hall, which traces the social changes in southwestern societies as they came into contact with differing socioeconomic systems from the 1300s through the 1800s. Hall depicts dynamic and diverse communities, including some in Texas, which, though overwhelmed by outside forces, survived by adapting to changing conditions. Some communities were more successful than others in adapting to change, and those that endured found themselves in a new role as ethnic communities when they became part of the United States.¹⁵

What became of the Tejano communities after 1836 is the focus of important studies by Arnolde De León and David Montejano.¹⁶ Approaching the topic from a regional perspective, the two authors focus on diversity within Tejano society, but they also point to the similarities of historical experience that allow scholars to speak of a Tejano identity. Indeed, Anglo-American expansionism of the 1840s converted Mexican settlements from El Paso to Victoria and Laredo to Brownsville into Tejano communities. During the second half of the century, the significantly larger and more heterogeneous population was bound together by their shared historical experience in the Spanish and Mexican past, by their relationship with the northeastern Mexican frontier, by their encounter with United States expansionism, and by their specific relationships as part of Texas.

De León's and Montejano's syntheses grew out of the surge of interest in Tejano history sparked by the civil rights and Chicano movements. During this period scholars in many fields examined records that yielded cultural and socioeconomic data

not previously mined. Américo Paredes was among the forerunners of the new scholarship. Heir of activist academicians like George I. Sánchez, Paredes countered the prevalent image of passive Tejanos by describing how South Texans resisted the efforts of the dominant culture to suppress their way of life and how they formed resilient and enduring communities. Following Paredes's lead, scholars in several disciplines turned their attention to Tejano history and culture. A number of anthropologists produced work on corridos (ballads), legends, and folkways such as curanderismo (healing). Others, like José Limón, researched early community organizational efforts such as Laredo's 1911 Congreso Mexicanista, through which Tejanos sought to protect their legal and cultural rights. Limón's work encouraged others to study mutualista societies, the G.I. Forum, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the community protest movements of the 1930s that recruited the assistance of the Mexican consuls, La Raza Unida Party, and Mexican-American labor.¹⁷

De León's study formulated explicitly what many of these studies demonstrated implicitly, that "although Tejanos lived in a markedly different world after 1836, things were not catastrophic." While he acknowledged that "white intrusion had disturbed their old communities," De León observed that Tejanos "retained their 'Mexicanness,'" maintained old traditions and beliefs, promoted their ways, and survived quite well despite a very hostile environment. At the same time De León argued that Tejanos defied easy categorization: "the variety of work [Tejanos] performed, the diversity of positions they occupied, the difference in achievement, the degree that set apart the literate from the illiterate, the politicized from the uninterested one, the pious and the nominal Catholics, the believers in curanderos and the skeptics, and other contrasts argue well for an image of a heterogeneous community."¹⁸ Despite all these differences, De León clearly linked these communities together under a specific Tejano identity.

The diversity of experience again emerged as a central theme for Tejanos in Montejano's recent study. This wide-

ranging synthesis described how urban and rural Tejano communities fared after the imposition of Anglo-American political and economic rule. Montejano traced capitalist development in South Texas since 1836 and showed its impact on relationships between Anglos and Mexicans. In doing this he offered important clues as to what forces created a shared Tejano identity among diverse Mexican communities. A common Mexican heritage in an Anglo-dominated society, similar hardships stemming from discrimination and exploitation, and ethnic solidarity founded on a struggle to attain equal rights all contributed to a heightened sense of Tejano identity, despite very real differences among and within communities in class, race, and local traditions.

While De León's and Montejano's broad syntheses demonstrate that Tejano diversity and shared identity have existed side-by-side, specific studies of communities reveal the same phenomenon. Perhaps the most important work of a specific Tejano community is Mario T. García's description of the Mexican barrio of El Paso from 1880 through 1920. Focusing on the community's economic, social, cultural, and political composition, García detailed the forces at work in the birth and development of a post-1836 Tejano community. Mexican immigrants to El Paso represented different economic classes, expressed varying political ideals, brought many cultural traditions, and were even of different racial backgrounds. Nevertheless, through various integrative political and socioeconomic processes, the Mexican barrio pulled together and formed a coherent and distinct society within El Paso.¹⁹

García's study describes a community that emerged out of an immigrant experience, but Tejano historiography must also take into account communities that made the transition from being part of the dominant society in the Spanish and Mexican periods to becoming ethnic communities within the United States. While the desirability of such a goal may seem self-evident, in fact only in recent years have scholars of Mexican-American history paid much attention to the Spanish- and Mexican-period origins of the Hispanic communities of