

Laura E. Belmonte, book review of Anthony Mora's *Border Dilemmas*, *AmeriQuests* 12.1 (2015)

Anthony Mora. *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912* (2011). Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. 392 pages. ISBN: 0822347970.

This work is an excellent contribution to research into the racially-charged ideological processes that relate to Mexican residents in the territories acquired by the United States in the nineteenth century. Anthony Mora's approach to the problematic racialization of a national identity brings to light the role that American imperialism played in creating a social strata in the Borderlands between the US and Mexico. The book focuses on southern New Mexico, specifically Las Cruces and La Mesilla, providing important insight into an area that is often overlooked in favor of New Mexico. Focusing upon these two towns, Mora draws attention to the racial categorization that Euro-Americans created to locate Mexican *mestizo* residents of New Mexico. The use of primary sources including interviews and depositions of these first generation Mexican residents of the US after the creation of the new border gives credence to Mora's claim that racialization of Mexican identity was infused into New Mexican society by Euro-Americans who were settling during the first part of the nineteenth century in New Mexico. The claim to "whiteness" was the New Mexican's ticket to upward mobility in the social strata after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.

The first chapter discusses different claims to Mexican identity amongst residents of Las Cruces and La Mesilla, and demonstrates how they serve as microcosms of Mexican identity as conceptualized in the United States and in Mexico. The people of Las Cruces came to terms with the racialized Mexican identity, while the people of La Mesilla did not necessarily view the Mexican identity as racial, but rather had certain cultural markers that distinguished it from an American identity. These contrasting views within two towns in close proximity geographically is an important starting point by Mora, because they predate the annexation of those territories, as do the ideologies surrounding the racializing of a national identifier that is the word "Mexican". This racialization meant that a Mexican is not necessarily a person who identifies with cultural practices, but rather is a person of indigenous and Spanish descent, a *mestizo*. This term creates a divide between a Mexican and a Native American, thus providing a social hierarchy for Euro-Americans to perpetuate their ideology of racial superiority. In the second chapter, Mora analyzes testimonies of residents of Las Cruces and La Mesilla, providing the reader with a window into the complexities of how divided first generation Mexican residents confronted the racial categorization of Mexican identity. Mora also identifies how space became a contested concept between Mexicans who were displaced by the border creation, and Euro-Americans who were settling in New Mexico.

Chapter three examines the connection that Euro-Americans made between a racialized Mexican identity and a Catholic one, enforcing as well the belief that non-white signified not American. Mora studies the dynamics that created discord between Euro-Americans and Mexicans, particularly the resistance to accept French priests who had arrived in New Mexico during the nineteenth century. The fighting between Mexican bishop José Jesús Baca and French bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy in southern New Mexico demonstrated that the religious space could play a role in authority, not only in the legal realm, but also in the moral and spiritual realm. The space is further colonized through the changing of the name of the parish Santa Genoveva to St. Geneviève, further establishing a Euro-American hegemony over the region. This morality also played into how Mexican women were perceived, which is discussed in chapter four. Along with the racist notion of Mexicans being savages, Euro-Americans also perceived them as "sexually depraved". Mora mentions that the Mesilla Valley was considered an immoral region, particularly because of the

inhabitants' identification with Mexican identity. He cites news reports documenting arrests of women for what was considered lascivious behaviors, thus creating a policing effort regarding morality. Mexican identity was, according thereby denigrated to promote the authority to colonize the lands and the people.

The final two chapters discuss the effort to create an image of what New Mexico was by the end of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, both Euro-American and Mexican Americans were looking to gain the attention of Easterners for investments in New Mexico, in part to help them achieve their goal of statehood. These attempts are made in order to convince Easterners that this area represented more than just a backward colony of Spanish residents. By the end of the nineteenth century, these Mexican Americans had constructed for themselves a new ideology: they were the Natives of this land, and were essential for the development of this territory on behalf of the United States because they had an historically legitimate territorial connection with New Mexico. Mora discusses in both chapters how these are ideological processes that are "artificial" in regards to the goal of statehood. This book is an excellent text to further explain the phenomenon of Fantasy Heritage in New Mexico, as well as add to the discussion of identity for Mexican Americans since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.

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