

# INTRODUCTION

Volume III of *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* focuses on the themes of community, identity and education. Several of the selections incorporate all three of these strains to describe how each has influenced and shaped the experiences of Mexican Americans.

The themes of community, identity and education are central to the articles by Ralph Cintron and Irene Campos Carr. In "Divided, Yet a City: A Brief History of Aurora, Illinois" and "Mexican Workers in Aurora: The Oral History of Three Immigration Waves, 1924-1990," Cintron and Carr, respectively, survey the development of a midwestern Mexican community from the early 1900s through 1990. These two studies, which are part of a larger research project, examine the Mexican, Mexican American and Latino experience in Aurora from different perspectives. Cintron's research focuses upon education and literacy in tracing the history of Mexican immigrants in the community. Carr's work draws upon oral histories of *mexicana* immigrant workers in Aurora to describe the different waves of immigration. Both essays, which are based on oral histories, delineate the impact of these migrations on the social, cultural and economic life of the community during this century.

The element of community is also present in June Webb-Vignery's "A Grande Dame Stripped of Her Jewels: The Last Days of Jacome's Department Store," which is a chapter excerpted from her larger study, *Jacome's Department Store: Business and Culture in Tucson, Arizona, 1896-1980*. The article traces the changes and forces, both economic and cultural, that led to the closing of this community institution in 1980.

In "The Quest for Power: Hispanic Collective Action in Frontier Arizona," David L. Torres and Melissa Amado focus on the Mexican elite in Tucson at the turn of the century. They describe the attempts of this commercially and business-oriented group to ward off U.S. cultural domination. By examining U.S. and Mexican forms of capitalism, the

authors describe how the elite attempted to retain a Mexican-based culture that recognized the primacy of the community rather than individual rights and freedoms. This struggle, they conclude, actually served to unify the Mexican elite and *el pueblo* (i.e. the proletariat).

Sylvia Rodríguez's "The Hispanic Homeland Debate Revisited" focuses on the question of identity. She seeks to place the fervent academic debate about the ethnic distinctness of Hispanic New Mexicans within a clearer analytic framework. The essay also examines the interactive process by which this notion of distinctiveness evolved or developed. In a related vein, Francisco H. Vázquez also ponders the question of identity, and its relationship to power and knowledge in "Chicanology: A Postmodern Analysis of Meshicano Discourse." The author presents a philosophical and theoretical discourse on how power and knowledge are manifested and exercised. The essay relates how these concepts have shaped and influenced *meshicano* discourse (the term is used to emphasize the relation of language to power), Chicanology, and Chicano Studies.

Language and culture are central elements that define a community. They are also substantive parts of one's identity. For Mexican Americans, language retention has been a cardinal principle in their struggle to preserve their cultural heritage. The battle over language rights has been lengthy and acrimonious. Roseanne Dueñas González, Victoria F. Vázquez, and John Bichsel discuss the history of this issue and its outcomes in "Language Rights and the Mexican Americans: Much Ado About Nothing." They argue that the conflict has shifted attention from and jeopardized the more important issue of equal access rights for Mexican Americans.

Health within the Mexican American and Hispanic community has been largely neglected and ignored by researchers. What does exist is largely impressionistic and based upon a paucity of accurate empirical data. As a result, little is known about the health status, needs and use of health care services by Mexican Americans. Even less is known about health care practices and beliefs that are culturally based. In their study of "Factors Related to Obesity in Mexican American School Children," Mary A. Alexander and Jacqueline Blank Sherman examine the values, customs and beliefs associated with health and nutrition among Mexican Americans. They then detail the social, cultural and economic factors associated with childhood obesity, and describe their impact on the health of school-age children.

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The research of David J. León and Dan McNeill will surprise many readers with its premise that affirmative action programs are not unique to the latter part of the twentieth century. "A Precursor to Affirmative Action: Californios and Mexicans in the University of California, 1870-1872," describes the development of a program designed to help students pass the strict entrance requirements of the newly formed University of California. This program, known as the "Fifth Class," was a sub-freshman grade that enrolled a number of Spanish-surnamed students. León and McNeill describe the program, the backgrounds and experiences of the students who participated in it between 1870 and 1872.

The theses, ideas and issues raised in this issue remain of critical importance to Mexican Americans. It is the editors' hope that these works will stimulate further research and promote greater discussion. We are grateful to the authors for providing us with timely, provocative, and insightful articles and essays.

The editors also wish to acknowledge Dr. Macario Saldate, Director of the Mexican American Studies & Research Center at the University of Arizona. His continuing support of this publication, and his Center's commitment to research, education and community service have been immeasurable. A special note of thanks goes to my co-editor, Thomas Gelsinon, whose editorial skills, insights, and labors on Volume III, and on the series have greatly lightened the workload involved in publishing each issue. His help has also made the task pleasurable and rewarding. I look forward to collaborating with him on the next issue of *Perspectives*.

Juan R. García,  
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