

9-1995

# Did NAFTA Rewrite History? Recent Mexican Views of the United States Past

Linda K. Salvucci

Trinity University, [lsalvucc@trinity.edu](mailto:lsalvucc@trinity.edu)

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## Repository Citation

Salvucci, L.K. (1995). Did NAFTA rewrite history? Recent Mexican views of the United States past. *Journal of American History*, 82(2), 643-647. doi: 10.2307/2082195

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up" (to say nothing of the French effort at "total" history), but they do not *feel* the political or cultural urgency of writing an all-inclusive history. Thus, while the political and constitutional struggles (and literary triumphs) of African Americans receive appropriate treatment in the Mélandri texts, their culture and social identity are largely neglected. Likewise Mélandri and Portes's discussion of *le féminisme* in their chapter on the 1960s is brief to the point of dismissal (a single page), and the treatment of Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans is similarly compressed—it occupies dramatically less space than in most American texts, even those that do not emphasize social history. As foreign authors writing primarily for their own students, French academics seem not to have experienced either the creative stimulus or the political pitfalls posed by the challenge of writing a genuinely "multicultural" history. Thus, even as French scholars of the United States imbibe and replicate American scholarship, they remain largely outside the "cultural wars" that increasingly affect the writing of American textbooks. If nothing else, this French "style" tells us something about our own intellectual and academic predicament.

#### TEXTBOOKS REVIEWED

*Chantiers d'histoire américaine* (American history workshop). Ed. by Jean Heffer and François Weil. (Paris: Belin, 1994. 473 pp. Paper, ISBN 2-7011-1613-9.) In French.

*Histoire des États-Unis depuis 1865* (United States history since 1865). By Pierre Mélandri. (Paris: Nathan, 1984. 316 pp. ISBN 209-190234-9.) In French.

*Histoire intérieure des États-Unis au XXe siècle* (Domestic history of the United States in the twentieth century). By Pierre Mélandri and Jacques Portes. (Paris: Masson, 1991. 364 pp. F 130, ISBN 2-225-82269-7.) In French.

*Great Dates in American History*. Ed. by André Kaspi. (New York: Facts On File, 1994. 240 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 0-8160-2592-4.

### Did NAFTA Rewrite History? Recent Mexican Views of the United States Past

Linda K. Salvucci

As a young graduate student residing in Mexico City in the mid-1970s, I often wondered what it would be like to teach United States history to university students there. The challenges appeared formidable. Not only did it seem that anti-

Linda K. Salvucci is associate professor of history at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She wishes to thank Hira de Gortari Rabiela, Carlos Marichal, Takako Sudo, and Josefina Vázquez for their kind assistance in Mexico City in August 1994. They, of course, are not responsible for any of the opinions expressed below.

Yankeeism was an integral component of Mexican intellectual identity in the waning years of Luis Echeverría's presidency, but the major bookstores carried few assignable (or affordable) titles. A handsomely produced, hardback Spanish version of Samuel E. Morison and Henry S. Commager's *The Growth of the American Republic*, first published in English in 1930, was the only textbook consistently in stock, and there appeared to be little current work on mainstream topics in United States history by Mexicans. On subsequent visits to the capital, I encountered a one-volume Spanish paperback edition of the textbook compiled by Willi Paul Adams, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, along with relatively less costly Spanish translations of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and a couple of Richard Hofstadter's books, but not much else. When I lectured at the University of Costa Rica in 1980, I was informed that the only available textbook in translation was Carl Degler et al., *The Democratic Experience*, which was distributed throughout Latin America, mainly under the auspices of the United States Information Agency (USIA). Since that time, I have been told that Spanish American university students of United States history are supposed to be fluent in English and therefore capable of reading the few prized library copies of untranslated textbooks, such as Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic*. I have also been reminded by colleagues that my experiences and perceptions are not unique, that they reflect, in the words of one, "a nearly universal phenomenon" in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, since 1988, some impressive materials on United States history have been published by Mexicans in Mexico. For example, a relatively inexpensive, two-volume paperback collection of essays, *Estados Unidos vistos por sus historiadores*, contains extended and thoughtful introductions to carefully chosen excerpts from the writings of Joyce Appleby, David Weber, Ira Berlin, Norman Graebner, James McPherson, Eric Foner, James Turner, Walter LaFeber, Martin Sklar, Alan Brinkley, Stephen Ambrose, and George McT. Kahin.<sup>2</sup> In the years immediately preceding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexican intellectuals were comfortable in approaching the bilateral relationship from a more familiar, less anti-Yankee stance.

Two of those who compiled the collection, Angela Moyano Pahissa and Ana Rosa Suárez Argüello, are also principal authors of *EUA: Síntesis de su historia I, II, III*, which forms about one-third of a far more ambitious and pioneering project "to understand the life and development of the people of the United States" begun

<sup>1</sup> Samuel E. Morison and Henry S. Commager, *Historia de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica* (The growth of the American republic), trans. Odon Duran d'Ocon and Faustino Ballve (3 vols., Mexico City, 1951); Willi Paul Adams, comp., *Los Estados Unidos de América* (The United States of America), trans. Maximo Cajal and Pedro Gálvez (Mexico City, 1980); Carl Degler et al., *Historia de los Estados Unidos: La experiencia democrática* (History of the United States: The democratic experience), trans. Harold Dies (Mexico City, 1981); Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (2 vols., Lexington, Mass., 1992).

Readers interested in donating recent editions of United States history textbooks and serials to Latin American libraries may contact me through the International Scholarly Relations Committee of the Conference on Latin American History at Auburn University or through the Department of History, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX 78212-7200; E-mail: lsalvucc@trinity.edu.

<sup>2</sup> Víctor Adolfo Arriaga Weiss et al., comps., *Estados Unidos vistos por sus historiadores* (The United States as seen by its historians) (2 vols., Mexico City, 1991).

at the Mora Institute, a publicly supported research center, in 1983. The three volumes under review here (along with a fourth, covering the post-1960 years, whose publication is imminent) provide the interpretive core (volumes 8, 9, and 10) of an extraordinarily comprehensive, eleven-book set, produced by a special team of Mexican scholars assembled from the country's most prestigious research institutions. Volumes 1-3 contain some 340 excerpts from "political" documents, while volumes 4-7 offer 436 selections from "socioeconomic" documents. The translation of these sources into Spanish is a particularly valuable contribution; students throughout the Hispanic world (including Latino students in the United States) will now be able to utilize this huge body of primary readings, ranging from standard texts such as the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence to less obvious tracts such as Catherine Moran McNamara's "Irish Life and Nativism in Boston" and Hugo Münsterberg's "Spirit of U.S. Business." The principles of selection for these materials are never articulated for the reader; the collection can only be characterized as an eclectic blend of the traditional, the innovative, and the obscure. I can think of no comparable assortment in English of so many and varied primary sources.<sup>3</sup>

As for the subsequent interpretive synthesis, it is difficult to do justice to this monumental and collective undertaking in a short review. The three volumes provide less an integrated narrative than a series of discrete essays, with considerable variations in substance and style. Overall, however, the authors have presented a remarkably balanced and densely detailed survey of United States history, informed by extensive reliance upon many of the standard textbooks and classic monographs on the American market by 1982. Such familiarity with United States historiography is not surprising, since many of the writers are part of a new generation of Mexican professional historians who have lived and studied for advanced degrees in the United States (as opposed to Europe, where many Mexican historians were previously trained). Several have published monographs on bilateral relations; for example, Moyano is the author of *México y Estados Unidos: Orígenes de una relación, 1819-1861*. Moreover, since January 1992 the Grupo de Estudios sobre los Estados Unidos de América has regularly published a bulletin to coordinate and publicize relevant research activities on both sides of the border.<sup>4</sup> These efforts represent an honest and unprecedented degree of intellectual curiosity about our nation and our people. Interestingly, the level-headed, at times detached, even sanitized tone of these essays on the United States contrasts markedly with the highly controversial, officially sanctioned textbooks on Mexican history prepared in 1992 for precollegiate students in Mexico. The intensely politicized debate over these latter materials has been even more persistent, heated, and substantive than our own current public discussion of the national history standards.

<sup>3</sup> [Instituto Dr. José María Luis Mora], *EUA (USA)* (11 vols., Mexico City, 1988- ).

<sup>4</sup> Angela Moyano Pahissa, *México y Estados Unidos: Orígenes de una relación, 1819-1861* (Mexico and the United States: The origins of a relationship, 1819-1861) (Mexico City, 1985); *Boletín del Grupo de Estudios sobre los Estados Unidos de América* (Mexico City).

While there is much that a literate American reader would recognize in *EUA*'s presentation of the United States past, some emphases are different. The Civil War receives only the briefest of coverage (a scant 25 of 500 pages in the first volume), while the second volume, whose cover features a photograph of Eugene Debs, devotes almost two hundred pages to a "comparative chronology" of the histories of the United States and Mexico from 1492 through 1920. If the intended audience is generally Latin American, then footnotes defining such terms as *Memonitas* (Mennonites) in the first volume are laudable, while Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats, unexplained and unequivocally translated as "*charlas junto a la chimenea*" in the third volume, must remain puzzling. At times, there is a touch of irony, as when the text steps even beyond revisionism to note that the United States was hardly isolationist in the 1910s and 1920s if the Western Hemisphere, rather than Europe, is the reference point. But mostly the authors play it very straight, telling the story/stories much as their American bibliography does. A personal inscription by one of the authors in a volume I have seen reads that this is United States history "from the Mexican point of view," but that perspective is far less in evidence and far less sustained than one might anticipate.

Treatment of even sensitive issues is remarkably measured. For example, the matter-of-fact definition of Manifest Destiny concludes succinctly that the concept "implied a racist attitude." The short discussion of the battle at the Alamo is dignified rather than defensive in tone, rebutting the perception of Mexican "cruelty" in executing the defenders by pointing out that they had violated the Mexican prohibition on foreigners' bringing weapons into Texas in the first place; for breaking that law (and others), they were branded as traitors and treated accordingly. The most unrestrained prose characterizes the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo as "the best deal in its [the United States'] history and its most shameful imperialist adventure," a sentiment that probably few American academics would contest. Overall, the prose is less partisan and heavy-handed than that in reciprocal accounts in some United States textbooks on the secondary and collegiate markets.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are several references to "Latin American readers" and United States history "for and by Mexicans," the intended audience remains elusive. Even before the current round of peso devaluations, this eleven-volume set was out of the price range of Mexican university students; in any event, it is not sold in the principal bookstores in Mexico City. Moreover, it appears that relatively few university students in Mexico ever study United States history. At the National University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM), only about 50 of some 50,000 students currently enroll in the year-long course in American history. Other public campuses, such as the Metropolitan University at Acatlán (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, or UAM), and much smaller private universities, such as the Iberoamerican University and the University of the Americas in Puebla, show

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 432, 442.

vigorous intellectual activity and interest on the part of their faculties, but the number of students appears to be small. At the prestigious College of Mexico, those three dozen or so students apt to sign up for the course in United States history that is offered biennially are usually master's degree candidates in international relations, while the vigorous research agenda at CIDE (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, in English, Center for Economic Investigation and Teaching) likewise seems driven by interest in modern American politics and the bilateral relationship. In this context, the emphasis on the twentieth century in *EUA* is understandable; it also corresponds to the tendency of American textbook authors to devote more and more attention to the recent past. Perhaps the projected audience (for a 10,000 print run) is really a nonspecialized class of Mexican university graduates from a wide range of professions.

In sum, *EUA* represents a serious, sustained, and fresh effort to understand the United States and its people by an accomplished and informed team of scholars. This massive project relies to an unprecedented degree on primary and secondary sources from the United States, while the careful tone effectively eliminates many of the cultural stereotypes and categories evident in previous works. Although there is an active community of Mexicanists engaged in specialized research and university teaching in the United States, no broad effort comparable to *EUA* exists here to understand Mexico and its peoples, even among educated Americans. Logic might dictate that such an effort is necessary, given the increasing integration of our economies, cultures, and populations.

#### TEXTBOOKS REVIEWED

*EUA* 8: *Síntesis de su historia*, 1 (USA, vol. 8: Synthesis of its history, 1). Ed. by Angela Moyano, Jesús Velasco, and Ana Rosa Suárez Argüello. (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1988. 498 pp. Paper, ISBN 968-6382-48-8/set.) In Spanish.

*EUA* 9: *Síntesis de su historia*, 2 (USA, vol. 9: Synthesis of its history, 2). Ed. by Cristina González Ortiz and Guillermo Zermeño Padilla. (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1988. 458 pp. Paper, ISBN 968-6382-48-8/set.) In Spanish.

*EUA* 10: *Síntesis de su historia*, 3 (USA, vol. 10: Synthesis of its history, 3). Ed. by Víctor Godínez Marcelo, Pedro Javier González, Angela Moyano Pahissa, Alma Laura Parra Campos, Patricia de los Ríos, and Ana Rosa Suárez Argüello. (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1991. 534 pp. Paper, ISBN 968-6382-48-8/set.) In Spanish.

Those wishing to purchase these volumes should contact the Instituto de Investigaciones, Dr. José María Mora, Plaza Valentín Gómez Farías 12, San Juan 03730, México, D.F.