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Between Two Worlds: The Literary Legacy of Southward Manifest Destiny and the Mexican American War

Connor D. Burns 21
DePauw University

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The Literary Legacy of Southward Manifest Destiny and the Mexican American War

by Connor D. Burns

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Sponsored by Harry Brown, Professor of English

Reviewed by Elizabeth Eslami, Assistant Professor of English

and Paul Johnson, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies

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In the entirety of my high school career, few courses spoke more to my soul than A.P. U.S. history, affectionately referred to as "APUSH" by teachers and students alike. For someone who has always been fascinated by history and the ways in which our country came to be, the opportunity to finally sit down in a formal classroom setting and engage with a proper curriculum regarding the circumstances of America's origins, turmoil, and eventual rise to the global superpower status it holds today was incredible. It felt like something I had been waiting for since I had first learned to mentally string words into sentences and dove nose-first into mountains of picture books about the then 43 Presidents of the United States.

But, as I sat back in my folded chair after capping off my final essay on that long-anticipated A.P. exam, there were still some things which bothered me, some parts of our history which I felt had far too little time devoted to them, given how impactful their consequences must have been. Sure, I had enjoyed nearly every page of our textbook, from Columbus' landing in the New World to the anticipation of an uncertain 21st century in pages that would only continue to be filled in later editions, but glaring oversights continued to nag at me. We had spent hardly a day in class discussing the Mexican American war, which had seen Mexico cede a whopping 40% of its land to its northern neighbor through the signing of a single treaty. For as important as this had seemed to me, it appeared as though we could not dwell on *this* war for too long, as the American Civil War loomed ahead of us, erupting just over a decade later. From this point on, it was as though a separate path had diverged entirely. Most of the latter half of the 19th century United States was characterized by what was known as the Reconstruction era, in which a country still fractured and reeling from its own near implosion, sought to further liberate or subjugate a population now emancipated from slave status. For our APUSH class, the Reconstructionist era set the stage for much of the political strife the United States would face in

the 20th century and has affected us in ways we can observe to this day. Despite all of this, the scale and impact of the overshadowed Mexican American War feels criminally overlooked. The stories of some 80,000 Mexicans who instantly became American citizens, and the stories of the thousands upon thousands who came after, are shoved to the background of American history curriculums as the charge continues into a deadly war and a tumultuous age of reconstruction. *What consequences did this war have for people?* I thought to myself, *how did something on as grand a scale as the Mexican American War affect how people viewed their own countries? How did some Mexicans cope with now being categorized as American citizens, yet still subjected to racial discrimination to those who also stood beneath that star-spangled banner? How much of that signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the document that put an end to two years of bloodshed, affects us today?* I wanted to seek the answers that APUSH could not provide me. Thus, in this thesis, I hope to shed further light on such historical complexities, and curate a well-backed claim as to why further, more detailed instruction of the Mexican American War and its consequences cannot be overlooked in the American education system.

War and Annexation

The neglect suffered by the Mexican American War from U.S. history textbooks cannot and will not erase the fact that it remains a war that massively shifted the cultural and political futures of two great democracies. Texas was a large chunk of land sitting right between the U.S. and Mexico which, in the late 1830's and early to mid-1840's, did not formally belong to either country, as Mexico had managed to establish only a feeble presence in the region's land market. Anglo Americans, white Americans of English colonial descent, fueled by their belief in Manifest Destiny that they had a God-given mandate to extend their influence and values throughout the rest of the world, began to encroach more and more southward, and conflicts inevitably began to flare between U.S. and Mexican settlers in the region. The continued U.S. occupancy of Texas by white Americans, primarily in search of cheap plots of land to buy and sell, eventually led the U.S. government, under President James Polk, to formally annex the territory in 1845, much to the grievance of the Mexican government, who believed that their shared presence meant the U.S. was not entitled to that land (Brack). In the eyes of the U.S. government, however, the move to acquire the territory practically justified itself. Perhaps no better could the collective sentiments of many government officials be found on this matter than in John O'Sullivan's brief and aptly titled 1845 essay, *Annexation*.

The short essay, published in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, a popular literary magazine co-founded by O'Sullivan himself, was made available to the general public just the formal annexation of Texas but at a point where the U.S. government had already considered it to be a state. O'Sullivan lays out his argument for why the acquisition of the land was not merely justified, but righteous. He calls for any outrage over the decision, be it from

Mexico or from within the U.S.'s own borders (northern abolitionists were reluctant to introduce more slaveholder states to the union), to cease their resistance and embrace the new territory with open arms, as he sees it as now being in good hands; rescued, in a way. "[Texas] is no longer to us a mere geographical space… she is no longer a mere country on the map" O'Sullivan writes in the early lines of his essay. Early on, he demonstrates the ultra-patriotic views which drive his philosophy on land acquisition and manifest destiny, whether it be negotiated diplomatically or through force. To him, any country not belonging to the U.S. is a blank slate. Until it lays beneath that star-spangled banner, a territory even as vast and rich in resources as Texas is nothing more than an opportunity to be either salvaged or squandered.

It also is made apparent throughout O'Sullivan's essay that he is concerned not only with the American victory in securing Texas, but with Mexico's resulting defeat through this annexation as well. "She [Texas] was released, rightfully and absolutely, released, from all Mexican allegiance, or duty of cohesion to the Mexican political body, by the acts and faults of Mexico herself, and Mexico alone." O'Sullivan does not view Mexico as a savage or barbaric state; it would be abhorrently intellectually dishonest to do so, as Mexico had a functioning political body similar to that of the United States. Still, O'Sullivan views the Mexican government as vastly inferior to that of the United States: incompetent and unable to govern a territory in any way which would not lend itself to be better off in the hands of a nation better suited to handling it. Not only this, but he casts full responsibility for the turbulent state of Texas onto Mexico, even though American citizens were just as present in the conflict as Mexicans in that territory. More subtle jabs at the perceived inferiority of Mexico, its government, and its people by O'Sullivan and those like him can be found littered throughout *Annexation*. Just one example of this can be observed in speaking of Texas' turbulent history in recent years, in which

he discusses "…the manner in which other nations have taken to intrude themselves into [Texas]…". Given that O'Sullivan's essay concerns itself almost exclusively with Mexico, it is clear that "other nations" is a sleazy allusion to America's southern neighbor. His use of the word "other", though, is quite telling here, in that the demeaning nature of the word is difficult to overlook. Furthermore, the use of "intrude" in this statement is important, both because it implies that Texas is an irrevocable property of America, and because it dehumanizes the Mexican people. The word "intrusion" triggers a sense of disgust in readers and suggests that, not unlike rodents, the Mexican people are invasive pests to be eliminated from what rightfully belongs to the United States. O'Sullivan's inclination towards subtle, dismissive, and offensive rhetoric provides us with yet another glimpse into the white nationalist, Anglo supremacist mindset. These nationalistic and essentialist (the belief that some things simply are, in this case, that Anglo Saxon America is innately superior to other nations and peoples such as Mexico and Mexicans) views are undoubtably one of the driving forces behind the U.S. invasion of Mexico and behind the concept of Manifest Destiny as a whole.

A rationale even more dubious and far more sinister than the jingoistic rhetoric which O'Sullivan espouses was its rationale for the existence and continued promulgation of slavery. One of America's biggest concerns with Mexico is that the latter did not share the former's enthusiasm when it came to the use of African slaves. After Mexico formally gained its independence from Spain in 1821, its government made it a point to outlaw slavery entirely, a move which immediately and most poignantly set it apart from its northern neighbor. This dealt a devastating blow to U.S. slave owners and those who supported the practice, as slaves now had a safe haven down south, and many successful attempts by these slaves to flee to Mexico were made via the underground railroad. Word managed to spread quickly among the U.S. slave

population as to how much more preferable Mexico was to America for someone like them, which only further emboldened them to flee. The U.S., hemorrhaging their prime source of southern labor, made a desperate attempt for diplomatic compromise in their proposal of a treaty which would coerce Mexico into returning escaped slaves back to their owners (Ortíz 43). The proposal was in vain, however, as Mexico rejected it wholesale, decrying it as a "palpable violation of the first principles of a free republic" (Mexican Congress, quoted in Ortiz, 41) Impressively, the young democracy of Mexico remained steadfast in a devotion to liberty that America was clearly lacking. This "safe haven" issue for the U.S. was the same reason why the nation was so adamant about the force breaking up and removal of Native tribes, which also typically housed former slaves. (Ortiz)

Historian Paul Ortiz details the often-tumultuous relationships Mexican revolutionaries shared with early American leaders, particularly when it came to the touchy subject of slavery. As early as the turn of the 19th century, Mexico sought assistance from the U.S. in its battle against the imperial Spanish power. José Maria Morelos was among the most notable of these Mexican revolutionaries, who advocated for the abolition of slavery in Mexico. He reached out to President James Madison in 1815, in the midst of the bloody Mexican Revolution, to ask for his hand in the fight to abolish slavery, reject tyranny, and serve as a dual beacon of liberty and progress for the rest of the world to follow. An excerpt from Morelos' letter details his mission:

> "I could not forsake the righteous Justice of our cause, nor abandon the righteousness and purity of our intentions aimed exclusively for the good of humanity: we trust in the spirit and enthusiasm of our patriots who are determined to die first rather than return to the offensive yolk of slavery, and finally we trusted in the powerful support of the United

> States, who has guided us wisely with example...we have sustained for five years our fight, practically convincing ourselves that there is no power capable of subduing a people determined to save themselves from the horrors of tyranny" (Morelos, quoted in Ortiz, 35).

Sadly, Madison, was not interested in Morelos' offer and rejected the man's pleas, fearing, like many others, that such a close alliance with Mexico would inspire slave revolts in the south, where Mexican anti-slavery influence was at its strongest.

A few years later, it was President John Quincy Adams who was more than apathetic to the plight of the Mexican people; he looked upon their efforts with grave contempt. Adams viewed the uprising as in no way comparable to the American revolution, which in his words, "…was a war of Freemen, for political independence— [The Mexican Revolution] is a war of slaves against their masters—it has all the horrors and all the atrocities of a servile war" (Adams, quoted in Ortiz 37). This comparison of the Mexican people to slaves was no coincidence, as people of brown skin were typically viewed as being lesser than white folks of Anglo-Saxon origin. "At the same time," Ortiz adds, "Adams disparaged Mexicans as inferior—he could not accept that they were capable of waging a genuine war of independence" (Ortiz 38).

Adams' resistance to the Mexican Revolution was not merely based on his perceived inferiority of the Mexican people, though that was undeniable a component in his rationale. He was also chiefly concerned with the preservation of one of America's oldest institutions. Ortiz writes, "Adams' denigration of the Mexican War of Independence demonstrates that a central motivation for U.S. imperial expansion into the West—the concept of Manifest Destiny—was that it would prevent the threat of revolt in the United States and keep the institution of slavery intact" (38). One thing shared between Adams and his predecessors was the continued

acquisition of land throughout the south and the east, primarily to serve the lucrative institution of slavery.

What cannot be ignored, however, is the astonishing change of mind that John Quincy Adams underwent between his time in office in the late 1820's and the raging Texas crisis just not even a decade later. Turning on a dime from his ideology of radical expansionism and decrying of slave revolts as "perfidies and treacheries of villains" (Quincy Adams, quoted in Ortiz, 38) Adams, now a congressman, delivered a scathing indictment of the U.S.'s devotion to slavery and their insistence on aggressively pursuing Mexican land. In a 1936 address to Congress, amidst the jeers and insults from his colleagues, he asked them, "what will be your *cause* in such a war? Aggression, conquest, and re-establishment of slavery where it has been abolished. In that war...the banners of *freedom* will be the banners of Mexico; and your banners, I blush to speak the word, will be banners of *slavery*" (Adams, quoted in Ortiz, 44). Adams seems to have come to the realization that many progressive-thinking Americans had been dreading: that the invasion means America is no longer worthy of carrying the mantle of democracy, if it was even worthy of bearing it in the first place. Still, the invocation of slavery in Adams's powerful speech makes it clear that the issue of slavery. It is furthermore apparent that Manifest Destiny, as horrific as it ended up being in justification for expansionism, imperialism, war, colonization, and genocide, owed much of its origins to the already cancerous, and unfortunately vehemently defended, institution of slavery.

Returning to the rationale behind public backing for the war, Jaime Javier Rodríguez of the University of North Texas tackles issues regarding Anglo reasoning behind the invasion extensively in his book *The Literatures of the U.S. Mexican War: Narrative, Time, and Identity*, a comprehensive analysis of a variety of literary works (and a few works of film and music)

pertaining to the Mexican American War and its storied aftermath. In his introduction, Rodríguez begins to lay the analytical framework for America's imperialistic aggressions that led to an attack which was, in retrospect, virtually inevitable. In his interpretation of *Legends of Mexico*, an 1847 documentary from George Lippard released as the war still raged, Rodríguez claims that Lippard "argued that what was at stake in the war against Mexico was the very meaning of life in the United States" (Rodríguez 4). The war happened because the mere existence and growth of the Mexican nation presented an existential threat to many U.S. citizens who viewed themselves as the beacon of light which the rest of the world should follow. With Mexico espousing those same principles of liberty and freedom for all, and actually living up to those standards through its own abolition of slavery, they were the ones who had "stolen" that mantel from the U.S., which irritated American and Anglo essentialists to no end. America ultimately ended up winning the war, and quite handily at that, but it was the circumstances surrounding the war which haunted American nationalists at the time, and in some ways can be interpreted as the reason for the war's omission from curricula even in the contemporary age.

U.S. expansion was not necessarily a new concept before the mid-19th century. The Monroe Doctrine had existed since 1823, in which President James Monroe essentially laid claim to the entire western hemisphere, warning European powers that any intrusion into this half of the world would be taken as an act of hostility against the United States (Moore). In many ways, though, it was this historical flashpoint where imperialistic aggressions from the United States really began to kick into high gear. It was actually John O'Sullivan himself who, in the year 1845, coined the term "Manifest Destiny", a phrase which would come to define the actions of America for years to come, beginning with their transgressions along the southern border (Heidler). Though many Americans supported the idea of spreading their ideals throughout all

corners of the Earth, there was an underlying sentiment of unease with the fact that the U.S. had declared war against an established democratic governing nation such as Mexico, John Quincy Adams being one of the loudest public voices of this call to take heed and reconsider the invasion. Prior to this, most of the U.S.' "enemies" had been native American populations, whom they sought to expel from supposed American lands, and could easily be dismissed as disorganized, unenlightened savages who deserved to be exiled or forcedly assimilated into American society. Mexico was different, however, in that its government, values, and origin mirrored the U.S. in a disturbing number of ways. The reality of the situation struck many liberal-minded Americans who felt their country was acting in a hypocritical manner. Theirs was a nation who, less than a century ago, had fought to gain their independence from a tyrannical colonial power. Now, it seemed as if the tables had turned and the U.S. was now playing the role of the imperial tyrant, just as John Quincy Adams had feared. More jingoistic, nationalistic, and even Anglo-centric individuals were also forced to contend with a sobering reality: that Mexico was not all that different from America, and that America was not alone in the world. This realization and the fear that inner crisis which accompanied it was a driving force behind the pervasive anti-Mexican racism that would forever infect the Anglo population.

As Rodríguez puts it, "Mexican Americans endure discrimination not only because many are dark-skinned but also because they are walking, talking proof that the United States, like other nation-states, depends on an ephemeral, always evolving, yet still vital national fiction, and what this approaches is the envisioning of Mexican Americans as global avatars" (6). To essentialist Americans, who believed their country to be the sole arbiter of righteousness, justice, morality, and civility in the world, were dealt a massive blow as Mexico was introduced to America's national story. The existence of an ever-growing, ever-evolving democracy that

bordered the United States spat in the face of the idea of manifest destiny, the belief that America had a divine mandate to extend her influence. How could such a dream of total domination of the western hemisphere be achieved with Mexico as a competitor, a constant thorn in the U.S.'s side? Rodríguez makes note of this, cementing his belief that, "Mexican Americans, because they often instantiate a kind of dual or multinationalism, can be readily perceived—or projected—as threatening to national singularity" (5). The anxieties among Anglo Americans set the entire course of this war in motion and, ironically, these anxieties only worsened after the war was won.

What also must be noted about the fragility of Mexican national identity, especially at this moment in history, was the fact that they themselves had only just achieved independence from Spain a few decades earlier in a long-fought revolution. Mexico had only just begun to get a taste of sovereignty before the U.S. came in and took some 500,000 acres of land, approximately 55% of Mexico's total landmass at the time, away from them (National Archives). Mexico was left to contend with bitter feelings of inferiority, and its people, especially those now living as second-class citizens in the states, were left spiteful of the country that was supposed to protect their best interests. Don Alamar, the fictitious Mexican American landowner in the novel *The Squatter and the Don*, which I will be analyzing in a later chapter, embodies these exact feelings of rancor. Were Mexico and its people destined to be constantly troubled by larger, more powerful nations? How was a country to formulate an identity if they were constantly at odds with outside forces which threatened its very existence?

The war eventually ended, but Mexican Americans (Mexican citizens living in newly acquired U.S. territory who opted to become citizens under the pretense of protection under the law) now faced their own set of challenges as, essentially, second-class citizens. Reginald

Horsman, Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, details the general sentiments which led to the maltreatment of Mexican Americans in the years after the war in his 1986 book *Race and Manifest Destiny*. The Texas conflict against Mexicans was significant for racial theorists in the United States because, in spite of the U.S. past dealings with people of color such as Native Americans, it was not until this point in history when the term "Anglo Saxon" became closely associated with race, effectively coming to be denoted as a race of "superior" white Europeans. Such a concept came into direct opposition to the brown-skinned *mestizaje*, a result of Spaniard and Native American crossbreeding and the most prolific racial group in Mexico. Anglo Americans disregarded the *mestizaje* on account of their perceived inferiority as a result of race-mixing with Native People, who had already been held in contempt by many Anglo Americans long before the border crisis came to a head. White racial purists viewed *mestizaje* as just as big a threat to the American racial and social homogeneity as Africans and Native Americans (Horsman 210, 211). As Horsman writes, "Mexicans who served as diplomatic representatives in the United States were shocked at the rabid anti-Mexican attitudes and at the manner in which Mexicans were lumped together with Indians and blacks as an inferior race" (213). That historical animosity among white Americans against black and indigenous peoples accelerated the cut-and-dry dichotomy that helped to draw a clearer distinction between Anglo Saxon Americans and the brown-skinned Mexican antagonists, and was the main reason behind Mexican American designation of second-class citizenry in the years after the war. The phrase "Anglo Saxon" was seldom used in political discourse, Horsman cites, until the dawn of the Mexican conflict, during which the term skyrocketed in usage and hit its peak around the mid-1840's, just before the invasion. Not only did this racial designation serve as a means of amplifying the "us vs. them" mentality which was necessary to foster racial

agitation and the subsequent war and land expansion, but it also was a means of uniting a very specific group of people as those chosen by God to carry out their manifest destiny. The motives behind the endgame of total U.S. domination were just as racial as they were political. So, for politicians such as John O'Sullivan, who used the concept of Manifest Destiny as a political weapon for the unchallenged assertion of white American dominance, the Anglo-Saxon designation was of the utmost value. It is no small wonder it became such a popular buzzword.

Such a distinction was also necessary in the formulation of a scapegoat for American essentialists who believed their woes were the product not of themselves, but of an "other." Naturally, if they supposed that the Anglo-Saxon race was superior to that of the Mexican, with whom they were in contention with, then the Mexican, who stands in the way of American's destiny, must be dealt with, just as O'Sullivan alluded to in his overtly anti-Mexican rhetoric and depiction of its people as a bothersome and intrusive monolith.

To create a racial divide as essential as that which Anglo supremacists wished to push, they had to draw the line at something which could never be reversed, and that was through blood. Horsman writes, according to Anglo essentialists, "…Mexicans, like Indians, were unable to make proper use of the land. The Mexicans had failed because The Mexicans had failed because they were a mixed, inferior race with considerable Indian and some black blood. The world would benefit if a superior race shaped the future of the Southwest" (210). The strategy here was to conflate this new enemy with Native Americans, a group who many white Americans already believed to be inferior and barbaric. It is true that much of the Mexican population were *mestizos,* people with both Spanish and Native American blood. Horsman continues: "While the Anglo-Saxons were depicted as the purest of the pure--the finest Caucasians—the Mexicans who stood in the way of southwestern expansion were

depicted as a Mongrel race, adulterated by extensive intermarriage with an inferior Indian race" (210). If such Native blood existed within Mexicans, Anglo supremacists argued, why would they be any more effective at creating a society than the dwindling Native American population? Now that the divide had been illustrated as clearly as possible and Mexicans' position on the U.S. racial hierarchy had been designated, the invasion and subsequent discrimination of Mexican Americans was ripe to happen.

Unsurprisingly, such sentiments continued after the war had ended, and the brunt of which was to be endured by Mexicans who found themselves in the newly ceded American Southwest. Even preceding the war, "The Mexican Americans were constantly attacked as shiftless and ineffective." Horsman writes,

> "Landsford Hastings, in his famous emigrants' guide of 1845, characterized the Mexican inhabitants of California as 'scarcely a visible grade, in the scale of intelligence, above the barbarous tribes by whom they are surrounded.' [referring to Native Americans] This was not surprising, said Hastings. There had been extensive intermarriage and 'as most of the lower order of Mexicans, are Indians in fact, whatever is said in reference to one, will also be applicable to the other.' Stereotypes that were to persist in American thinking long after the 1840's were firmly fixed in Hasting's work" (211).

It was not a difficult task to get Anglo-Americans to subscribe to this hatred for the Mexican people. Such racial agitations had already been ingrained in American society through years of anti-Native racism, all which was to be done was to draw that blood relation between Native Americans and Mexicans, and the Mexicans were to be condemned to second-class citizenry, and an onslaught of discrimination by the Anglo race with whom they now shared the American Southwest.

The Fiction of the Disaffected

The realities of the war and of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were difficult to contend with for those on both sides of the fence. Mexico had been swiftly defeated, its strongholds toppled and the land it once claimed as its own drastically reduced. From the smoldering battlegrounds of the war emerged a new literary archetype who would eventually find his way to various other forms of media throughout the following decades: the Mexican Bandit. The tale of the Mexican Bandit is a tragic one. Devastated by Mexico's loss in the war and shunned by Anglo-Americans who now see what was once his land as their own, he turns to a life of crime, seeking to exact revenge against the Americans who wronged him and deny him the chance at living a happy life. For as daring and bombastic as the Mexican Bandit is typically portrayed in the media, the essence of his struggle is not much different from that of many Mexicans who found themselves displaced, in terms of both their physical location and their identity, after Mexico's defeat. Such a story is exactly what we can find in John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit* (1854), the novelette which introduced the enigmatic character of the Mexican Bandit to the world.

While John Rollin Ridge's account of the life of the bandit mostly lies within the realm of fiction, there is some historical debate with regards to whether "Joaquín Murrieta" actually existed, and in what capacity the events of his life contributed to the narrative of the short novel. Jamie Javier Rodríguez breaks down the historical ambivalence of the bandit's origins, writing: "The familiar Mexican bandit...now appears as a clarifying figure, because he acts on a decisively mythological stage. He never loses his complexity, but the array of fissures in his symbolic value becomes overshadowed by sweeping ahistorical abstractions that drive him

toward reductive containment and definitional comprehension" (81). What Rodríguez argues here is that the liberties Ridge took in the application of this fictionalized folkloric narrative to the figure of the Mexican bandit served as a means of narrowing the intents and goals of a man whose real-life motives, if he even existed in real-life, were far more abstract than the simple novel may suggest. Thus, through the creation of this backstory with the "real" bandit as the foundation, Ridge is able to craft a narrative much more easily understood, and taken to heart, by his predominantly Anglo-American audience.

Joaquín is introduced as a nonviolent, unassuming, and passive young man who simply seeks to carve the best life possible for him and his wife in the land which had just recently been annexed as the now-U.S. state of California. The peace Joaquín seeks is not easily attained, however, as he falls victim to constant intimidation, beatings, and destruction of property at the hands of white settlers who, emboldened by their recent victory in the war, looked upon Joaquín and those like him with contempt, for in the eyes of the Anglo Americans they were "no better than conquered subjects of the United States, having no rights which could stand before a haughtier and superior race" (Ridge 9). Joaquín's tolerance of such harsh mistreatment reaches its breaking point when he visits the house of his half-brother on a horse that his brother had lent him. The townsfolk later claim that the horse had been stolen and, despite the lack of evidence that it was, Joaquín is subjected to a series of whippings and his half-brother is publicly hanged "without judge or jury" (Ridge 12). It was this lack of justice or due process which infuriates Joaquín the most, as the justice system in freshly annexed territories seldom, if ever, provided the same treatment to people of color or different national origins as those with Anglo blood. These Mexican Americans often fell victim to predatory squatters, people who would take advantage of the U.S. government's flippant attitude towards Mexican American property rights, a situation

which I will cover in further detail in my analysis of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885).

Following the hanging, Joaquín swears vengeance upon the entire Anglo race for wronging him and his half-brother. He brutally murders a member of his brother's lynch mob shortly after and finds it may be a long time before his newfound thirst for Anglo blood is quenched. Ridge writes, "the iron had entered too deeply in his soul for him to stop there. He had contracted a hatred to the whole American race, and was determined to shed their blood, whenever and wherever an opportunity occurred" (13). The peaceful man that once was is no longer. The Mexican Bandit is born, and all subsequent characterizations of this literary archetype, the manifestation of revenge by a dispossessed group of people, are destined to follow in the footsteps of the famed bandit Joaquín Murieta. The actual character of Joaquín Murieta is sensationalized to a degree, but he does have his origins in reality, the name being borrowed from an actual historical bandit involved in a robbing spree in the early 1850's. It thus goes to show that real grievances on the behalf of Mexican Americans is no mere literary creation.

In spite of Joaquín's grisly origins and harsh vow, he is not a senseless killing machine, nor is he incapable of showing mercy. Joaquín is quite intelligent and calculating, made clear through his uncanny ability to carry out his mission while avoiding apprehension from law enforcement, and even recruiting other shunned Mexicans to his cause. Not only is Joaquín highly intelligent, but he is also depicted as having an extraordinary charm and charisma which makes him naturally suited to lead this ragtag group of disenfranchised bandits with chips upon their shoulders. Ridge puts his protagonist's magnetic personality on full display when he is arrested one night for disturbing the peace and fined twelve dollars by a Sheriff Clark who,

oblivious to Joaquín's true identity, reveals to the bandit his utter disdain for the banditry. Joaquín, taking full advantage of the Sheriff's cluelessness,

> "...requested him to walk down to his residence in the skirts of town, and he would pay him the money. They proceeded together, engaged in pleasant conversation, until they reached the end of a thicket when the young bandit suddenly drew a knife and informed Clark that he had brought him there to kill him, at that same instant stabbing to the heart before he could draw his revolver" (Ridge, 18).

This scene is a perfect encapsulation of Joaquín's balance of charm and lethality, which makes him particularly effective at what he does.

Multiple instances throughout Joaquín's tale show us that, although his animosity towards those who mistreated him still burns with the intensity of a blazing sun, he remains capable of a degree of forgiveness and decency. Before putting his mission to spread chaos and devastation to Anglo people and farmers throughout California, he established a code to which he and his cohorts would abide by. A paramount rule would be "to injure no man who ever extended them a favor, and, whilst they plundered everyone else and spread devastation in every other quarter, they invariably left those ranches and houses unharmed whose owners and inmates have afforded them shelter or assistance" (Ridge 17). Notes on Murieta's character such as these, are invaluable in creating sympathy with the audience, something the author clearly wishes to do. Many readers would be reluctant to side with Murieta, even after the torment he has endured, as his propensity towards gratuitous violence is simply a byproduct of a world which denies him a peaceful life, as Ridge plainly espouses in the opening lines of the novel, "The character of this truly wonderful man was nothing more than a natural production of the social and moral condition of the country in which he lived" (7). It is the same reason why we

tend to sympathize with slave characters who rebel against their masters, or abused characters who choose to fight back against their abusers.

In fact, Joaquín is, in many regards, the hero of his own story. In a world that has turned his back on him, Joaquín fights for recognition. Joaquín's silent crusade is emblematic of the muffled cries of millions of Mexican people who starve for dignity and recognition by those who seek to subdue them. Furthermore, much of the potence embedded within the pages of Ridge's short story lies in its ability to show the potential of unity, and how much can be done when a people come together, united under a single cause. Ridge makes it clear that, as exceptional a bandit as Joaquín is, the grand scale of his retributive goals cannot be achieved without the help of his gang members. "I intend to arm and equip fifteen hundred or two thousand men and make a clean sweep of the southern counties," Joaquín dictates as he muses over his master plan, "I intend to kill the Americans by 'wholesale', burn their ranchos, and run off their property at one single swoop so rapidly that they will not have time to collect an opposing force before I will have finished the work and found safety in the mountains of Sonora" (Ridge 65). There's strength in numbers, and though it may not seem it to many dispossessed Mexican Americans, Mexico still has those numbers. She may have lost many of its people to a changing border, but their national origin, their culture, the blood that runs through their veins, remains the same as it had before the war. Physically, the Mexican people are scattered and fragmented, but their collective spirit remains intact if they so will it, and therein lies their power.

The character of Joaquín Murieta is timeless, his archetype forever ingrained into popular culture not only in the U.S. and Mexico, but around the world. Even if many still do not know of his name or his story, his struggle remains ubiquitous. Even less people are familiar with John Rollin Ridge, the man behind Joaquin Murieta, whose identity also brings great intrigue and

forces the reader to view Murieta's adventure from a different angle. Ridge is a Native American, writing about a Mexican anti-hero who opposes Anglo citizenry. His role as a third party in the grand scheme of this story allows him to remove (although not entirely) himself from many of his own presuppositions or experiences pertaining to either Mexican or Anglo peoples. One might wonder, why would a Native American writer choose to breathe life into a tragic Mexican bandit who fights against even more heinous Anglo villains while still adhering to a solid code of morals? As a Native American, one would assume that Ridge has at least a reasonable degree of experience at the receiving end Anglo racism in the same way that the once-peaceful Joaquín was preyed upon. Agitation from white Americans is sure to internalize itself in some form, and Joaquin's struggles may serve as an extension of his own woes, albeit with an alteration of racial background; the idea remains the same. What is even more interesting is that Ridge did not believe in the equality of races and advocated for the assimilation of Native people into American society. A descendant of slave owners and even a slave owner himself at one point, Ridge also opposed abolition and the Union's cause during the Civil War (Hsu xix). Furthermore, despite being Cherokee himself he did not necessarily view Native Americans in a positive light, likely due to the fact that his father, grandfather, and a few other relatives were murdered in a land dispute by another faction of Cherokee over a land dispute involving the federal government which, although Ridge's relatives viewed as altruistic for the tribe, was viewed as unfavorable and even traitorous by other tribe members. The traumatic incident is outlined in the preface to the story: "When a small boy, [Ridge] saw his father…stabbed to death by a band of assassins employed by a political faction, in the presence of his wife and children in his own home. While the bleeding corpse of his father was yet lying in the house, surrounded by his grieving family, the news came that his grand-father…was also

killed; and, fast upon this report, the others of his near relatives were slain" (Hsu 1, 2). As desperate land negotiations stripped Ridge from his home and family, it would not be a difficult task for him to sympathize with Mexican Americans who had found themselves in situations not too dissimilar from his own. The incident caused Ridge and his mother to move out to California, but he was doomed to carry this burden with him the rest of his life (Hsu 2). It also parallels the tragedy which befalls Murieta, losing his brother in a flash to a hateful and irrational mob, the only obvious difference being that the assailants in Ridge's personal tragedy were brown-skinned Natives as opposed to Anglos. Still, it is possible and even probable that such an incident catapulted the story of Joaquín Murieta, which would eventually be born to life, a projection of Ridge's own trauma at the hands of a group far more powerful than himself. Ridge died never having exacted vengeance upon the faction responsible for the murder of his loved ones, another reason why Murieta's repeated successes at extinguishing Anglo life and property throughout most of the story could serve as another form of literary catharsis for the author.

Ridge's mixed views on Native Americans can be observed in *Joaquín Murieta*. On one hand, Native Americans are viewed in a light that is, if not overtly positive, at the very least sympathetic. Early in the story, solidarity is found among Native Americans and Murieta's small and at the time unorganized group of Mexican Bandits through their shared victimhood in a land dominated by Anglo rule of law. Ridge writes, "In the rugged fastnesses of the wild range lying to the west of this huge mount…did the outlaws hide themselves for several long months, descending into the valleys at intervals with no further purpose than to steal horses, of which they seemed determined to keep a good supply. They induced the Indians to aid them in this *laudable* purpose" (41). The Native people, already at odds with Anglos living in the region, are happy to engage in such activities to spite their antagonists, especially with Murieta's gang there

to guide them. This is where the more negative aspects and Ridge's potential bias against Natives appear, as he has the tendency to depict Natives as being poorly organized and weak planners. A scene is detailed within those same pages wherein a group of Natives attempt to steal horses on their own accord, and are subsequently met with gunfire, which kills a number of Natives attempting to escape across a river. It was only through the covering fire of a member of Joaquín's gang that the entire group of Native thieves were not slain. Ridge laments this Native incompetency following the incident: "The ignorant Indians suffered for many a deed which had been perpetrated by civilized hands. It will be recollected by many persons who resided at Yreka and on Scott's River in the fall and winter of 1851 how many 'prospectors' were lost in the mountains and never again heard from; how many were found dead, supposed to have been killed by the Indians, and yet bearing upon their bodies the marks of knives and bullets quite as frequently as arrows" (42, 43). The sympathies and comradery Ridge (and Murieta) share for the Native peoples is still apparent in this passage, acknowledging their mountain of suffering by Anglo aggressors, but he still draws a clear distinguishing line between the Natives and the Bandits as to the sheer difference in tactics and capability. Even amid his sympathies, Ridge still labels Natives as "ignorant" and, as this description immediately follows the failed heist at the river, shows how grave the cost of such ignorance can be. The reality of the American story is that of the insurmountable bloodshed of Native peoples, and it is troublingly clear that Ridge sees this "Native ignorance" as contributing to their dwindling numbers.

A defining aspect of the character of Joaquín Murieta, and of the Mexican Bandit archetype, is that of an affinity for danger and antagonism of one's opponent. He makes it clear that his intentions are to steal Anglo-owned horses and damage Anglo property, not shying away from killing in the process, but there are instances where Murieta ignores his goals and chooses

to agitate Anglos simply because he enjoys it so much. Take, for instance, a scene in which Murieta, his name infamous but his face yet unknown, walks in and sits down at a small-town tavern:

> "While sitting at a monte table, at which he carelessly put down a dollar or two to while away the time, his attention was suddenly arrested by the distinct pronunciation of his name just opposite to where he sat. Looking up, he observed three or four Americans engaged in loud and earnest conversation in relation to his identical self, in which one of them, a tall fellow armed with a revolver, remarked that he 'would just like once in his life to come across Joaquín, and that he would kill him as quickly as he would a snake.' The daring bandit, upon hearing this speech, jumped on the monte table in view of the whole house, and, drawing his sixshooter, shouted out, 'I am Joaquín! if there is any shooting to do, I am in.' So suddenly and startlingly was this movement that everyone quailed before him, and, in the midst of the consternation and confusion which reigned, he gathered his cloak about him and walked out unharmed…The extreme chagrin of the citizens can be imagined when they found, for the first time, that they had unwittingly tolerated in their very midst the man whom, above all others, they would have wished to get ahold of" (Ridge 28).

There is certainly something to be said here about the joy Murieta takes in toying with those he seeks to destroy, and who seek to destroy him. It is as though he relishes the opportunity to embarrass his opponents more than outright defeating them or robbing them of life and property as they had done to him. In this instance, the revelation of his identity served no practical purpose whatsoever; things could only be made worse for Joaquín and his gang, but humiliation

is good enough reason for the infamous bandit whose reputation would now be made even more notorious.

Analyzing scenes such as this in the context of Mexican American resentment and anxieties allows us a glimpse into the power fantasies that such marginalized groups might harbor. Naturally, as relationship between America and Mexico turned from a tentative mutuality prior to the war to a tumultuous state under the threat of expansion as the war heated up, so too did the collective feelings of resentment among the Mexican and Mexican American populations, and the feeling that their identities were dissipating as America loomed overhead. Rodríguez believes that archetype of the fiery bandit is a direct creation of such sentiments. He writes: "the systemic sublimation or substitution of a Mexican cousin by a Mexican bandit foreshadows the effacement of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from contemporary society" (Rodríguez 22). Most Mexican Americans, though undoubtably disadvantaged in Anglo-dominated lands, were not as partial to violence and plundering as the fictional Joaquín Murieta, but still wished for some sort of vengeance upon the Anglo people who wronged them or tolerated the white supremacist system from which they benefitted and Mexican Americans suffered. Compared to ruthless killings, humiliatingly satisfying yet overall harmless acts of jest such as these serve as much more digestible to the average reader who projects their own experiences onto the character of Joaquín who, in a metaphorical sense, swims among hungry sharks and even teases them with his presence. Such a massive ego which begs to have itself constantly validated is a driving force behind many of Joaquín Murieta's decisions, and as we will come to see, it ends up being his downfall.

As *Joaquín Murieta* reaches its third act it becomes startlingly clear that, as cunning and resourceful as Joaquín may be, his carelessness in exposing himself to those who wish to

apprehend him or do him harm begins to catch up to him. In response to the unignorable damages done to Anglo Californians, the governor enlists a squadron of the best officers the state has to offer, spearheaded by the feared and revered Captain Love, to capture Joaquín and his cohorts dead or alive and put an end to the lawlessness which has come to consume California. Not lost is the irony that Joaquín's crusade was born from lawlessness on behalf of Anglo citizenry and the fact that the increasingly paranoid law enforcement gives no due process to those presumed to be associated with Joaquín's bandits. The hysteria over the banditry became so inflated that Love's squadron was far from the only ones on the hunt; vigilantism became the natural order: "Thus was the whole country alive with armed parties," Ridge writes, "whose separate movements it would be impossible, without much unnecessary labor, to trace. Arrests were continually being made; popular tribunals established in the woods, Judge Lynch installed upon the bench, criminals arraigned, tried, and executed upon the limb of a tree; pursuits, flights, skirmishes, and a topsy-turvy, hurly-burly mass of events that set narration at defiance" (117). A standout line here is Ridge's mention of attempting even to track the rampant vigilantism, which it seems has been elevated to the same extent as banditry by this point, would have been unnecessary, as virtually all resources have been allocated towards stopping Joaquín. The motivation to apprehend the bandits but the dismissiveness of the sheer number of vigilantes demonstrates a subtle yet clear double standard on behalf of law enforcement.

We see a vital example of such wanton disregard for any sort of civil order and rule of law around this late point in the story, when a presumed but not verified bandit is captured and "put on trial" by the people of a city: "The committee ascertained that [the presumed bandit] was wounded, a pistol-ball having pierced him in such a manner as to make four different holes, from a twisted posture, no doubt, which he had assumed, and, being able to elicit no satisfactory

account as to how he had received the wound, they reported to the crowd that it was their opinion that it would not be amiss to hang him and risk it anyhow, whether he was guilty or not" (Ridge 119). Believing his death warrant to have already been signed, the man pleads guilty in a last-ditch effort to save himself from the ultimate punishment, but still his efforts prove to be in vain, and the committee has their way of brutal vigilante justice: "The time-honored custom of choking a man to death was soon put into practice, and the robber stood on nothing, kicking at empty space" (Ridge 119). Joaquín's actions have turned the entire state of California on its head, it seems, and the rule of law also falls victim. Now, it seems as though the principle of innocence until proven guilty has been reversed, and those who fall under the paranoid gaze of the Anglo townspeople stand little chance of salvation. One could make a strong argument that the hysteria produced by Joaquín's reign of terror serves as an allegory for the inevitable collapse of the social fabric of Anglo society if the oppression of Mexican Americans and groups of similar marginalized status does not cease to be perpetuated and their plight continues to go ignored. Ridge argues through his tale that, under such conditions, an uprising in Joaquín's fashion is not simply hypothetical, it is practically guaranteed.

The unforgettable tale of Joaquín Murieta reaches its climax as the gang prepares to carry out its final mission before it is deemed that the bandits have caused enough damage to get their message across and earned enough spoils to live out the rest of their days in comfort. Amid the intense crackdown on banditry from the California governor, our once seemingly infallible anti-hero is beginning to slowly fall victim to his own paranoia. Such paranoia is illustrated in a simple scene as preparations for the final heist are underway: "Feeling, one evening, somewhat inclined for a dram and unwilling to show his own person, he sent from Guerra's rancho an

Indian to bring him a bottle of liquor from San José. After the Digger[1] had started, he became a little uneasy, lest the fellow betray him, and, mounting his horse, overtook him on the road, near to Cayote Creek, and killed him" (Ridge 127). Several items are of note in this brief passage. First is Joaquín's unwillingness to go into town, even in disguise, for fear of being recognized and killed. This, of course, is a major departure from the Joaquín we saw earlier in the story, who went out of his way to make public appearances and treated those potentially perilous situations like a circus act. Second is the clear unease Joaquín feels even towards Native Americans, who have been in alliance with his bandits throughout the entire story, united in their shared antipathy towards the Anglo people and governing body. Joaquín's circle of trust has shrunk to the point where those who were once his allies become potential foes, and the killing of the presumably innocent Native makes it apparent that Joaquín is pulling no punches in preventing his own capture.

What John Rollin Ridge has managed to orchestrate up to this point is the social domino effect that violence and hatred can have on a society. In simple terms, Anglo violence towards Mexican Americans leads to Mexican American violence against Anglos. Fear among Anglos leads to paranoia and the breakdown of the criminal justice system, and the gung-ho vigilantism and dismissal of due process leads to paranoia among Mexican Americans, any one of which, even the totally innocent ones, could now be branded and persecuted as bandits. Ultimately, neither group benefits. The spiraling path of violence is one of endless suffering.

Joaquín's arrogance and paranoia are the mixture which leads to his demise in the closing pages of the story. The former was a major factor in leading law enforcement to pursue him so

[1] Use of the word "Digger" here is derived from "Digger Indian", a derogatory term applied to Native Americans who were labeled as savages due to the stereotype that certain tribes pulled roots directly from the earth and ate them raw. (Lonnberg)

zealously, while the latter confirms upon him a mistake which ends up proving fatal. Captain Love and his squad encounter Joaquín and several of his bandit accomplices at one of their camps and order them to stand down and submit to questioning. Joaquín remains calm and collected, assured that his identity is anonymous, and that the vexing situation could be escaped through his silver tongue. Then, the bandit recognizes the face of one of Love's crewmates, "Lieut. Byrnes, who had known the young robber when he was an honest man a few years before" (Ridge 131). Joaquín, believing his cover to be blown, abandons his cool façade and orders his men to flee and scatter. However, caught off guard and finally matched in riding and firing skill by Love's veteran gang, Joaquín and those present with him are killed. It is not until after the Joaquín's final, doomed scuffle has concluded when a shocking revelation is made. Until the dead body was verified to be Joaquín's, "all were ignorant of the party which they had attacked. Byrnes did not happen to be looking at Joaquín when he first rode into camp, and consequently had not recognized him at all" (Ridge 134). Tragically, Joaquín's panicked call to disperse was done in vain.

Instead of electing to dispose of the body of Joaquín's corpse entirely, the California governor preserves the severed head within a jar of alcohol, a display of clear hypocrisy of American lawmen who purported to decry that same kind of savagery. Similarly, the three-fingered hand of Joaquín's closest ally, aptly named "Three-Fingered Jack", who also perished in the fated fleeing attempt, was preserved as a trophy of both victory for Anglo Californians and a gruesome warning of those who would dare to oppose white Anglo dominance as Joaquín did. It was also done as proof that the legendary bandit actually had been dealt with, as "It was important to prove, to the satisfaction of the public, that the famous and bloody bandit was actually killed, else the fact would be eternally doubted" (Ridge 134). While the months-long

struggle may appear to have ended in a victory for Anglo American people, the specter of Joaquín and his gang of outlaws continues to loom far after his supposed death. Ridge is sure to make mention that "Many superstitious persons, ignorant of the phenomenon which death presents in the growth of the hair and nails, were seized with a kind of terror to observe that the moustache of the fearful robber had grown longer since his head was cut off and that the nails of Three-Fingered Jack's hand had lengthened almost an inch" (135). Even in death, Joaquín remains as fearsome and pervasive in the Anglo conscience as he was when he ravaged the California countryside.

The concluding two pages in John Rollin Ridge's short yet poignant work removes the reader from the narrative and dedicates itself rather to a reflection by the speaker of the state of affairs which leads to such a manic tale. The speaker first eulogizes Joaquín, stating that "His career was short…but, in the few years which were allowed him, he displayed qualities of mind and heart which marked him as an extraordinary man, and leaving his name impressed upon the early history of the state" (Ridge 136). Then, he makes it abundantly clear that he believes the actions and mission of the titular hero, in spite of all his morally ambiguous deeds, to be justified. He continues from the eulogy, declaring, "He also leaves behind him the important lesson that there is nothing so dangerous in its consequences as *injustice to individuals*- whether it arise from prejudice of color or from any other source; that a wrong done to man is a wrong to society and to the world" (Ridge 136). Here is where the message Ridge hopes to convey is most orated in the most blatant terms, that prejudice against people leads only to further violence and destruction, and that the blame for said violence falls squarely upon the shoulders of those who initiate it, and not those who act simply in retaliation and self-defense. Such as the message we are left with, as the final paragraph of the piece reads, "Of Rosita, the beautiful and well-

beloved of Joaquín, nothing further is known that she remains in the Province of Sonora, silently and sadly working out the slow task of a life forever blighted to her, under the roof of her aged parents. Alas, how happy might she not have been, had man never learned to wrong his fellow-man!" (Ridge 137). Ridge leaves us with the reminder that it is not simply those who commit acts of violence who are wrought to suffer from said violence, but rather a snowball effect is incurred, and even the most simple, innocent, and pure among us are doomed to suffer the accumulated consequences of violence when hatred and prejudice rear their foul heads. This degree of autonomy of a scorned people is exactly what Rodríguez alludes to in his analysis of the Mexican bandit, where he asserts that, "dismissive of the law, they [Mexican bandits] are a law unto themselves" (81). A main point which Ridge seems to want his readers to take away from his novelette is the fact that conceivable extent of law pales in comparison to the will of those who believe they have not received the justice they deserve, in this case, the Mexican American people. Vengeance has no regard for the institution of law; thus, it would be foolish for Anglo aggressors to believe it will protect them from the raging tide of a scorned people.

The Tale of Joaquín Murieta, the folkloric figure who, regardless of the reality of his existence, managed to embed itself deeply within the Mexican American zeitgeist. So much so, that he even received his own *corrido*, a type of song which revered and mythicized heroes like Murieta and those who came after him. The lyrics of the song explore Murieta's timeless character, including his propensity towards danger and violence, but still manage to capture the kind and righteous man who can still be found within. As there are multiple inconsistencies between the *corrido* and Ridge's novel, it is apparent that the *corrido* has crafted somewhat of its own narrative with regards to the legendary bandit, though it is clear that many of its elements

were inspired by the sensational book that preceded it. The *corrido* begins, sung from the perspective of the famous bandit himself, begins:

Yo no soy americano	I'm not American
pero comprendo a inglés	But I understand English
Yo lo aprendí con mi hermano	I learned it with my brother
Al derecho y al revés	backwards and forwards
A cualquier americano	I can make any American
Lo hago temblar a mis pies	cower at my feet
Cuando apenas era un niño,	when I was still a child,
Huerfano a mí me dejaron	my parents left me an orphan
Nadie me hizo ni un cariño	I got no affection
A mi me hermano lo mataron	my brother was murdered
Y a mi esposa, Carmelita,	And my wife, Carmelita,
Cobardes la asesinaron	was murdered by some cowards

(qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* 2466, 2467)

The *corrido* is sympathetic to those unacquainted with Murieta's story, offering a brief introduction to his national origins and turbulent relationship with Anglo Americans, as well as the events which drove him to the brink of banditry. One notable added difference in the song which was not present in the story was the murder of Murieta's wife, here named Carmelita instead of Rosita. Why the author of the *corrido* chose to engage in such revisionism is subject to speculation. It must be stated that while the Ridge's novel is geared towards a predominantly white American audience, the *corrido* was written to be sung to Mexican ears. This matter of intent may explain some of the inconsistencies. Perhaps the songwriter felt that the death of a spouse was a useful tool to strike an emotional chord with an audience that values the family above all else. Likewise, Ridge may have sacrificed Joaquín's brother to an incorrigible mob as

a means of showing how corrupt the American justice system was in particular. Regardless of the way the bandit's origins unfold, his tale remains throughout all mediums. The song continues with a relation of his misunderstood motives and rationale:

Yo me vine de Hermosillo	I came from Hermosillo
En busco de oro y riqueza	In search of gold and riches
Al indio pobre y sencillo	I fiercely defended
Lo defendí con fiereza	The poor and simple Indian
Y a buen precio los sherifes	And sheriffs put
Pagaban por mi cabeza	A Price on my head
A los ricos avarientos	I took money away
Yo les quité su dinero	From the greedy rich
Con los humildes y pobres	I took off my hat
Yo me quité mi sombrero	To the humble and poor
Ay, que leyes tan injustas	Oh, these unjust laws
Fue llamarme bandolero	That label me a bandit!

(qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, 2467)

The more agreeable and generous aspect of Joaquin, essential in tackling the complexity of his troubled character, is detailed in this section of the *corrido*. The songwriter makes sure to mention Murieta's innocent intentions in coming to America, only to be met with vitriol. His Robin Hood-esque tendencies of helping poor and similarly scorned Mexican people is mentioned, as well as his allyship with tribes of Native Americans who were similarly subject to discrimination. Furthermore, he laments the label of bandit for such theft, which he considers to be righteous, demonstrating Murieta's belief that everything he does is justified for what he and those like him have suffered, regardless of what some flimsy and corrupt set of laws might

say. Joaquín's headstrong philosophy in this instance is wholly consistent with the bandit in Ridge's novel.

Further along in the *corrido* comes the narration of Murieta's rapid consolidation of loyal followers, along with the fear which quickly came to consume those he stood against:

Mi Carrera comenzó	My career began
Por una escena terrible.	With a fearful scene
Cuando llegué a setecientos	When I reached seven hundred
Ya mi nombre era temible	my name was famous
Cuando llegué a mil doscientos	By twelve hundred
Ya mi nombre era terrible	My name was terrifying
Yo soy aquel que domina	I'm the man who subdues
Hasta leones africanos	even African lions
Por eso salgo al camino	Which is why I'm on the road
A matar americanos	killing Americans
Ya no es otro mi destino	It is my destiny
¡Pon cuidado, parroquianos!	Watch out, whoever is nearby!

(*Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, 2467)

This *corrido* captures both sides of Joaquín Murieta, both the kindhearted altruist and the ruthless destroyer, whose name inspires fear in Americans and hope in Mexicans, the living antithesis to Anglo supremacy. As the song nears its close, Murieta makes a bold assertion fitting of his character:

No soy chileno ni extraño	I'm not Chilean or a stranger
Es este suelo que piso	on this earth that I walk
De México es California	California belongs to Mexico
Porque Dios así lo quiso	because that is God's will

Y en mi sarape cosida — And in my serape is sewed
Traigo mi fe de bautismo. — My baptismal certificate[2]

(qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, 2468)

To Joaquín, the presence of so many Mexican Americans in California means that the land cannot be denied to them as it has been. California is so deeply sewn into Murieta's spirit that he considers it to be a divine mandate, an invocation of religion, along with baptism, which speaks to the largely Christian population of Mexico. This stanza in particular expertly captures that repressed sense of belonging that so many lost and anxious Mexican Americans hungered for, assuring them that while California may belong to the Anglo people on paper, the rallying cries of their homeland can still be found in their hearts.

Whether it is written, sung, or passed through word of mouth, John Rollin Ridge's unforgettable short story tale of a decent man scorned by a brutally racist society serves another purpose as well, a cautionary one. May those who seek to further subjugate the Mexican people beware that some will not go quietly, and a refusal to acknowledge not only the Americanness, but their humanity, may manifest itself in far more destructive ways than they may realize.

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While Ridge's tale of Mexican Banditry is relatively short, a much more comprehensive view of the Mexican American struggle postwar can be found in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don*.

Ruiz de Burton was a pioneer for Mexican American representation in writing in the years following the war, as she was the first Mexican American to publish a novel entirely in

[2] *Corrido de Joaquín Murieta* translated from its original Spanish by Ilan Stavans

English, a novel which today stands as a defining piece of literature in the chronicling of the struggles and injustices faced by Mexican Americans in an often unforgiving postwar American south. Like Ridge, she is such an interesting figure to study from a historical perspective because, as the Mexican American woman wed to an Anglo man and living in California, it is difficult to pin her within a single national or racial camp. Her own story, sympathetic towards different factions but also wholly aware of the lopsidedness of the sociopolitical dynamics of her time, offered her a unique and nuanced perspective of the crisis, which is reflective in this poignant and important piece of Mexican American literature.

The California Land Act of 1851 forced Mexican American Landowners like Don Mariano to prove that the land they held was their own before Congress, lest it be subject to government usage or overrun by squatters (Sánchez & Pita 18,19). Much of the novel focuses on a man by the name of Don Mariano Alamar, a Mexican American who on a mission to have his land ownership verified by the U.S. government, while simultaneously attempting to ward off "squatters", people who attempt to establish a living presence on property like that which is own by Don Mariano as they take advantage of Congress' indifference towards the property rights of Mexican Americans. While the conflicts faced by Joaquín Murieta take place on a smaller, more individualistic scale, the challenges faced by leading characters in *The Squatter and the Don* are concerned with broader, more institutional discrimination against Mexican American settlers. The story itself focuses on a dynamic between, as the title would suggest, a "squatter" named William Darrell and Don Mariano. Darrell, along with his son, Clarence, have moved to California from the northeastern United States in hopes of acquiring a sizable piece of land for his family, after living a nomadic lifestyle for most of his life foregoing any real stability, much to the chagrin of his wife. William's wife bemoans the fact that most of his past land grabs have

involved staking a claim on someone else's property and paying the government to remain on that piece of land, regardless of how the property's owner may feel about it. Mrs. Darrell expresses her distaste for William's habits in the opening pages of the novel: "I do certainly disapprove of acts done by men because they are squatters, or to become squatters. They have caused much trouble to people who never harmed them…Whenever you take up government land, yes, you are 'settlers,' but not when you locate claims on land belonging to anyone else. In that case, you must accept the epithet of 'Squatter'" (Ruiz de Burton 56). William, on the other hand, a complex character who views his own actions as justified, fires back at his wife's accusations and claims his desire to settle on the Alamar Ranch is born only from desperation and his own victimization: "But of one thing you can rest assured, that I shall not forget our sad experience in Napa and Sonoma valleys, where--after years of hard toil-- I had to abandon our home and lose the earnings of years and years of hard work" (Ruiz de Burton, 57). Here, in a subversion of the traditional patriarchal gender binary, Ruiz de Burton assigns the voice of reason and consciousness to the woman, whereas her husband is serving more as the id in this dialogue, restless to achieve a "victory" for himself and his family, even if others may suffer unjustly in the process. Regardless of motive or rationale, plans by squatters like William Darrell to acquire homesteads on Mexican American-owned land is by no means a fictional narrative component of this story, nor was it uncommon in the decades following the Mexican American war, and it serves as the basis for the events of the rest of the novel to unfold.

We are introduced to Don Mariano in the second chapter of the novel. Mariano is a decent and upstanding *ranchero* (ranch owner) who seeks to give the best life possible for his wife and children, in spite of all the challenges he has faced and continues to face from the federal government and their unwillingness to extend the same privileges under the law as they

do Anglo citizens. Don Mariano muses over the implications of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the effects it has had on the Mexican American populace in the aptly titled chapter, *The Don's View of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*. At first, Don Alamar admits he felt the same sort of resentment and humiliation that was shared by many Mexicans, confiding in his wife that "when I first read the text of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, I felt bitter resentment against my people; against Mexico, my mother country, who abandoned us—her children—with so slight a provision of obligatory stipulations for protection" (Ruiz de Burton 65). War carries with it a great burden of emotions, especially for those who lose, as demonstrated through Don Mariano's words here. The Mexican people were dumbstruck by their loss in the war, not particularly because they had expected to defeat the invading U.S. forces, but rather because the claims enacted by the victors seemed so swift and so harsh, as though Mexico did little to negotiate otherwise. The country had lost a massive chunk of its territory, but in the days, months, and years after the dust had settled over a new border, Mexico felt as though it had lost its national identity, its sense of purpose in advancing towards a goal of shared national unity in an increasingly modern world. The Don continues with his sentiments though, stating that these same rash feelings eventually subsided: "afterwards, upon mature reflection, I saw that Mexico did as much as could have reasonably been expected at the time" (Ruiz de Burton 65). In the years following the conflict, Don Alamar turns his animosity outwards, towards the United States. He believes the U.S. framed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo around amicable, mutually beneficial terms, and then turned around and pulled the rug from beneath Mexico, betraying their terms and causing Mexico and her people even further pain. "The treaty said that our rights would be the same as enjoyed by all other American citizens," Don continues, "But, you see, Congress takes very good care not to enact retroactive laws for Americans, laws to take away

from American citizens the property which they hold now, already, with a recognized legal title. No, indeed. But they do so quickly enough with us—with us, the Spano-Americans, who were to enjoy equal rights, mind you, according to the treaty of peace. This is what seems to be a breach of faith, which Mexico could neither suppose nor prevent" (Ruiz de Burton 65). What the Don refers to specifically here is the fact that Congress did not uphold its end of the bargain with regards to the terms laid out in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which they agreed to uphold the property rights of Mexican American citizens, a move which forced those like Don Mariano to scramble to prove their ownership while faced with the threat of squatters (Sánchez & Pita 18, 19). This legal conflict as a result of Congress' betrayal of its own citizens is what really sets the stage for the backdrop of the novel.

As readers will come to see throughout the course of the story, the character of Don Mariano serves as an allegory for the struggles and shifting views of the Mexican people when it comes to issues of national sovereignty and discrimination from governments in the position to abuse its power, in this case, the writhing ball of resentment they harbored towards Mexico shortly after the war to America in the decades that follow. The Don may have very different philosophies than someone like Joaquín Murieta when it comes to how they choose to manifest these animosities, but both share similar backstories of being scorned by those with whom they are supposed to coexist. There is also something to be said about how the actions taken by the two protagonists are reflective of the abuse they are subjected to. Joaquín, relentlessly bullied and harassed by vicious Anglo aggressors and losing his brother to a violent mob, likewise turns to a life of violence and manifests his grievances in that manner. The maltreatment of Don Mariano, on the other hand, is less physical and more legal in the way it comes to consume his property and lifestyle. It is the government and squatters slowly coming to encroach upon his

land, and therefore Don Mariano and his allies must be methodical, and exercise patience, in their efforts to keep these forces at bay. This stark difference in responses shows us that the path forward for the Mexican American people is not a clear one, and the means in which they must go about in liberating themselves from oppression and reclaiming their identities are not unanimously agreed upon.

A frustrated Don Mariano eventually comes to realize that he will not win his battles without some form of compromise. Thus, he invites recent Squatters in the area, Darrell and Clarence among them, and attempts to draw mutually beneficial boundaries between the two parties. Don Mariano invites the group of squatting prospects to his home to discuss these matters, but first, a preemptive conversation is held among the group of squatters. Darrell is open to speaking with Don Mariano and, while the squatter acknowledges that he will place the wellbeing of his family first and foremost, he does not care for the mindless destruction of property held by others, regardless of their race. Dialogue among these squatters early in the novel demonstrates the varying views they all hold when it comes to how liberal they choose to be in their takeover of land owned by Mexican American folks: "'Those greasers ain't half crushed yet. We have to tame them like we do their mustangs, or shoot them, as we shoot their cattle,' said Matthews" (Ruiz de Burton 71). Dismissiveness and even contempt for Mexican property and life was regrettably common among Anglo Saxon peoples living at this time, and the character of Matthews gives us a fairly realistic view on the matter. Of course, the denial of equal property rights to Mexican Americans on behalf of Congress and the de facto rejection of certain conditions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made it clear that those in power shared this same sort of contempt, which did nothing but embolden racist squatters in their mission to sacrifice Mexican American comfort for their own security.

In *Race and Manifest* Destiny, Reginald Horsman makes mention of the justification used by Anglos for such apathetic callousness when the victim is brown-skinned: "The process of dehumanizing those who were to be misused or destroyed proceeded rapidly in the United States in the 1840s. To take lands from inferior barbarians was no crime; it was simply following God's injunctions to make the land fruitful" (211). Ruiz de Burton does an excellent job of conveying the sentiments of such Anglo squatters which, aside from Clarence, range from aloof indifference to utter malice. In the eyes of some of these men, it was an act of mercy to claim land from the "inferior *mestizo*" and, under the guise of Manifest Destiny, believed such a steal was ordained God, who had ordained the Anglo people to spread their influence whenever possible. This expansionist dogma, along with an odious mixture of racism and narcissism, affirmed their crooked belief that land is infinitely better under Anglo ownership than *mestizo* ownership.

Another, more pragmatic squatter by the last name of Hughes, who shares a similar apathy towards the "inferior barbarians" to whom Horsman makes reference, chimes in after Matthews: 'Oh, no. No such violent means are necessary. All we have to do is take their lands, and finish their cattle,' said Hughes, sneeringly, looking at Darrell for approval. But he did not get it. Darrell did not care for the Spanish population of California, but he did not approve of shooting cattle in a way which the foregoing conversation indicated. To do this was useless cruelty and useless waste of valuable property, no matter to whom it may belong. To destroy it was a loss to the State. It was folly" (Ruiz de Burton 71). It is clear from the conversation that the average squatter looked down upon Mexican Americans such as Don Mariano and his family with great contempt. Even Darrell, who managed to clear the low bar amongst the conversationalists as being the most sympathetic towards Don and those like him, argues his

point not from pity for those who may suffer but rather a distaste for seeing potentially valuable things go to waste. Also on display here is the sentiment of blatant disregard for the humanity of Mexican Americans held by squatters such as Matthews and serving as a microcosm for the unfortunate reality of many views at this time.

The more agreeable side of William is shown shortly after this scene, when the Squatters arrive near Don Mariano's ranch and are deciding where exactly they will stake their claim. Other Squatters among them are eager to jump on any piece of land they can get their hands on, but William is much more willing to comply with the law:

> "'Well, I want to respect everybody's right, so I want you all to bear witness, that I found no stakes or notices of anybody. I don't want to jump anybody's claim; I want a fair deal. I shall locate two claims here—one in my own name and one for my oldest son, Clarence.'
>
> 'You'll take 320 acres?" asked Hughes.
>
> 'Yes, 320 acres—according to law," replied Darrell" (Ruiz de Burton 73).

The 320 acres William cites here refers to a condition of the Desert Act of 1877, essentially an extension of the land conditions under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which the government permitted single men (almost always Anglo) to stake a claim of a maximum of 320 acres on plots of arid western land for the price of $1.25 per acre, regardless of if some of that land was owned by a Mexican American such as Don Mariano (Bureau of Land Management). Few terms do a better job show the blatant lopsidedness between the opportunities afforded Anglo squatters the punitiveness imposed upon Mexican American landowners.

One of the major distinctions between *The Squatter and the Don* and *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* is the way in which their authors go about displaying Anglo "opponents". Ridge seems to have very limited interest in characterizing any Anglo as morally good or even very sympathetic; they exist almost exclusively as a literary device to spark Murieta's journey and serve as roadblocks to his ultimate goal. In this respect, they serve as a sort of foil for the character of Joaquín Murieta, Ruiz de Burton chooses to take a more nuanced approach to her depiction of white Americans. There are some who are certainly depicted in a reproachful light, particularly some of the Squatters who accompany the Darrell's. It is through these characters that the author is able to diffuse the chauvinistic tropes of many closed-minded Anglos at the time, but it is through characters such as William and Clarence, who are featured much more prominently than the other Squatters, that Ruiz de Burton manages to craft a depiction of Anglos which is far more morally ambiguous, and ultimately more compelling. This is not an indictment of Rollin Ridge's skills as a writer; rather, it is simply a consequence of the kinds of stories these pieces and their respective authors wish to tell. The story of Joaquín Murieta is a short story, something most could easily breeze through in a couple of hours, whereas Ruiz de Burton's tale, a several-hundred-page novel, chooses to adopt a more concerted effort in establishing and developing its world and characters. I do not believe the goal of Ridge was to curate a deep and nuanced world, but to tell a direct story about the dangers of pushing a people too far. The romantic elements of that his story, including Murieta's desire to find a safe, permanent home for him and his wife, may serve as a literary tool for igniting his rage, but it mostly serves only as that: a literary tool, and it is relegated to the back as Murieta's revolution of banditry takes center stage.

While María Amparo Ruiz de Burton manages to convey all these pressing matters on the ongoing struggles of Mexican and Hispanic peoples during these turbulent times, these themes ultimately serve as a backdrop for the events of the novel at large, pervasive as they may be. In reality, *The Squatter and the Don* is widely considered to be a historical romance novel. Much of the story focuses not on Don Mariano and his venture for the security of his land from invading Squatters, but rather the romantic relationship between his daughter, Mercedes, and Clarence Darrell. The trials and tribulations that the two lovers from vastly different backgrounds manages to serve as an allegory for the difficulties in the cohabitation of homeland that existed among Anglo and Mexican populations, and especially the challenges more progressive-minded folks, such as Clarence, as they sought to establish a healthy mixed-ethnicity relationship in a society which greatly discouraged it. Such a marriage is especially important given the open hostilities and fears that Anglo society expressed towards the *mestizaje* and race-mixing "poisoning the well" of Anglo society, like Horsman discusses. Perhaps even more interesting is the idea that the blossoming relationship between Mercedes and Clarence can be read as a mirror for Ruiz de Burton's own life and marriage.

Ruiz de Burton's experiences early in her life and her witness to different sides of the Mexican American struggle gave her a rare insight into different stories in a rapidly changing America. Like the fictional Don Mariano, Ruiz de Burton's grandfather, Don José Manuel Ruiz, attained a fairly respectable status among the Mexican American population, as he was a commander for Mexican forces in the early 19th century and was granted two small ranches in *Baja* (Lower) California as reward for his services. Despite the political power and reputation held by him and his family, his economic power and access to resources remained scarce (Sánchez & Pita, 10).

Given her grandfather's reputation, it was arranged that a teenage Maria Amparo Ruiz would meet a U.S. army captain by the name of Henry S. Burton as U.S. forces made their way throughout Baja California. In spite of the twelve-year age difference ended up becoming romantically entwined, and when the war ended and the signature of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, they made their way to *Alta* (Upper) California to be wed in the newly christened U.S. territory, as the terms of the treaty left *Baja* California to Mexico. (Sánchez & Pita, 11).

The marriage in and of itself was unable to avoid controversies, primarily concerning the different religious affiliations held between the two parties, as Burton was a Protestant and Ruiz was a Catholic. Much buzz was generated among the community of Monterey, California, where the two were ultimately married, so much so that accounts of the wedding and circumstances which aimed to stop it were detailed in the *California* Pastoral, a collection of writings from California native Hubert Howe Bancroft:

> "Captain H.S. Burton fell in love with the charming Californian, María del Amparo Ruiz, born at Loreto, and aged sixteen. She promised to marry him. The servants reported this to a certain ranchero who had been unsuccessfully paying his addresses to her, and he informed Padre [father] González, saying that a Catholic should not marry a Protestant. The Padre thanked the man in a letter, which the latter hawked about offensively, out of spite, because his suit had been rejected. But for all this, the Loreto girl married the Yankee captain" (Sánchez & Pita, 11).

Additionally, according to the novel's introduction from Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita,

> "Marriage vows were also taken before a priest at Santa Barbara, for although it was deemed a 'heretical marriage', the guardian of the see 'deemed it discreet not to declare it null, but to remove the impediments'. A prominent journalist associated with the *San Diego Union* and the *Los Angeles Times* by the name of Winifred Davidson "described their love affair in her article 'Enemy Lovers' as the union of 'natural enemies', given their differences in religion, nationality, and age at a moment of war" (11).

Still, despite the social pushback, the romance between Ruiz and Burton prevailed. The pair produced two children and lived happily for over a decade until the outbreak of the U.S. civil war, for which Burton was enlisted to fight for Union forces and tragically died of malaria, widowing Ruiz de Burton. She sustained herself and her children through lands acquired by her late husband prior to his death, and through the writing of plays and novels which would reflect her experiences with displacement, discrimination, economic uncertainty, loss of identity, and the feeling of being caught between two different worlds: a Mexican girl thrust into an unfamiliar American world at such a tender age (Sánchez & Pita, 12-14).

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's life as widow was characterized not only by a dive into the literary arts, but also by a flurry of legal battles, primarily against American businessmen and capitalists from whom she sought to defend land and ranches she saw as rightfully belonging to her and her family. Although Ruiz de Burton had been christened an American citizen after her marriage, she chose to identify with her Mexican heritage as she stood in opposition to these Anglo forces. In fact, she was so zealous in these pursuits that she ended up becoming estranged from several of her own family members along the way and living out her final days in poverty (Sánchez & Pita, 15). These frustrations and feelings of powerlessness against corporate giants manifest themselves within the pages of *The Squatter and the Don* in the form of the monolithic

railroad monopoly that bears its own malice against the comparatively small cast of characters. Romance aside, *The Squatter and the Don* shows us, as we will come to see, that capitalism was one of, and in many ways continues to be, one of the most powerful, oppressive, and lethal tools the Anglo elites levied against the Mexican American population.

The relationship between Mercedes and Clarence is first established in a sort of taboo manner. Clarence, who holds a deep respect for Don Mariano despite their limited interactions by this point in the novel, arranges to hold a private meeting with the Don in order to further discuss terms and agreements over how land will be divided. He does this because he felt the first meeting with the group of squatters was ineffective, and that the Squatters would end up acting irrationally or outright disregard Don Marino entirely if new rules were not negotiated. As someone raised in a family which always felt the need to be mindful of how capital is handled, Clarence fears seeing anyone robbed of what money is rightfully theirs. Upon his arrival at the Alamar ranch, Clarence confides in Don Victoriano, the son of Don Marino, "I don't like this fashion of taking people's lands, and I would like to pay Señor Alamar for what has been located by us, but at the same time I do not wish my father to know that I have paid for the land, as I am sure he would take my action as a reproach—as a disclaimer of his own actions, and I don't wish to hurt his feelings, or seem to be disrespectful or censorious" (Ruiz de Burton 92). Clarence is a tragic character in his own right in that he is torn between a sense of justice and sympathy for the marginalized Mexican American population, and a sense of loyalty and devotion to his father, as he is aware just how much security means to him. Thus, a discreet meeting is Clarence's only hope of making some sort of mends not only with those around him, but with himself as well. Clarence's arrival at the meeting, it seems, has been blessed by fate, as it is on the front veranda where Mercedes runs into him, quite literally. Mercedes twists her

ankle chasing the runaway family dog through the house and ends up stumbling right into Clarence's arms. In a poetic fashion which seems to exist only in fiction, their first interaction is described as little short of love at first sight:

> "Looking up to see the eyes above them, their eyes met. Hers expressed surprise, his merriment. But a change in their expression flashed instantaneously, and both felt each other tremble, thrilled with the bliss of their own proximity. Her face was suffused with burning blushes. She was bewildered, and without daring to meet his eyes again, stammered an apology, extending her hand her hand to reach some chair or table to hold herself, but they were all crowded at both ends of the piazza" (Ruiz de Burton 93).

Considering *The Squatter and the Don* is primarily a romance novel, it would be easy to write this meeting as simple romance flair; the kind of over-the-top love at first sight gag that has almost become parody of itself in romance media or even media in general when a "fated" interaction occurs. However, I believe Ruiz de Burton knew exactly what she was doing with this scene and wanted it to serve as a statement. The palpable chemistry and immediate attraction shared by Mercedes and Clarence is so instant and essential, not requiring any sort of preliminary interaction, that it is depicted simply as completely organic. What Ruiz de Burton wants to show her audience here is that love transcends race, culture, and borders. When we establish boundaries for ourselves, and vilify those different from ourselves, we are denying ourselves an essential component of our nature. The romance between Mercedes and Clarence is utopian, in a way, as its broader implication is that of the U.S. and Mexico, Anglo and Mexican peoples, living in total harmony. Despite all the hurdles Ruiz de Burton and her husband faced, trying to wed and start a family amidst the turmoil of a postwar America, her life is proof that such a fantasy could become reality if we set our differences aside and practiced love instead of

resorting to hatred and division. In this sense, to be able to write so extensively about a relationship between a Mexican American and an Anglo man almost certainly afforded a grand deal of catharsis to the author, as well as its disaffected readers at the time, who may have felt that hope was lost on any sort of reconciliation after the brutal war and its harsh repercussions. *The Squatter and the Don* is ripe with depictions of the unjust reality that Mexican Americans were forced to deal with in the war's aftermath, from blatant racism to legal neglect to corporate suppression, but the message of love manages to transcend these things, showing the tattered nations of America and Mexico that hope is not lost on the future.

The tale of the romance shared between Clarence and Mercedes is one of love, comradery, and the vanquishing of all enemies social and political which seek to prevent such marriages. That, however, is not the only tale in *The Squatter and the Don*. There also exists the far more dismal story of the Mariano family's fight against both the state and against corporate interests, an uphill battle to say the least.

At the time of the novel's events in the late 19th century, the U.S. government was in bed with the Central Pacific railroad company, and corruption between the two was rampant. Central Pacific grew to become an unchecked corporatist monopoly chartered by the U.S. government themselves, and it was in their interests, and the interests of the government, that they expand as far as possible into California, including land owned by Don Mariano (Sánchez and Pita, 29-31). Being a Mexican American, he is already fighting a tough battle by filing an appeal to Congress to attempt to prove the validity of his land ownership. The presence of stubborn squatters on his land makes that even more difficult. Thus, the Mariano clan find themselves in a race against time to reach a compromise with the band of squatters before the ever-encroaching Central Pacific railroad company assumes full control of the land.

Amidst the vicious battle for the appeal, a rare dialogue is conducted between George Mechlin, a close friend of Don Mariano who had traveled to Washington D.C. to argue his friend's cause, and U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant. Here, not wanting to pass on his opportunity to relate the injustices wrought upon Don Mariano and those like him before the most powerful man in the country, George relates to his family how he told President Grant,

> "'how the squatters were destroying Don Mariano's cattle, and how by law of a California legislature, anyone could plant a grain field without fencing, and take up cattle that went to those fields, no matter whether there was any title to the land, or whether the field was larger than one acre.'
>
> 'But the law does not open to settlers' private property? Private land?'
>
> 'Yes it does, because land is not considered *private property* until the title to it is confirmed and patented. As the proceedings to obtain a patent might consume years, almost a lifetime, the result is that the native Californians (of Spanish descent) who were landowners when we took California, are virtually despoiled of their lands and their cattle and horses. Congress virtually took away their lands by putting them in litigation [referring here to the California Land Act]. And the California legislature takes away their cattle, decreeing that settlers need not fence their crops, but put in a *corral* the cattle that will surely come to graze in their fields. As the cattle don't know the law, they eat the crops and get killed'" (Ruiz de Burton 135).

It should be noted that George does not specifically incite the railroad dilemma here, as he is well aware how inclined the President is to support it. That is the looming issue, but the issue of the squatters is also something of grave concern to Don Mariano, not only because of the

economic hemorrhaging he suffers through the loss of his cattle, but also the fact that the squatters indirectly pose an existential threat by impeding the attainment of the document which would save the family from Central Pacific railroad. In the end, even at the behest of the President of the United States, Don Mariano's appeal is simply put on hold. Despite his best efforts, George could do was delay its dismissal.

A bit later in the story, Ruiz de Burton introduces a court scene which demonstrates the appallingly corrupt procedure of the construction of the Central Pacific railroad. Prefacing the charges of fraud brought against the monopoly is a long meditation on the moral blight and inclination towards corruption of corporatist Congress and the soulless politicians who comprise it, cleverly diffused through the thoughts of George Mechlin:

> "'If only the lawgivers could be made to reflect more seriously, more conscientiously, upon the effect that their legislation must have on the lives, the destinies, and the fellow-beings *forever*, there would be much less misery and heart-rending wretchedness in this vale of tears…if these law-givers see fit to *sell themselves* for money, what then? Who has the power to undo what is done? …the constituencies will be the sufferers, and feel all the effects of pernicious legislation" (Ruiz de Burton 190, 191).

This inner monologue on politicians who put wallets before welfare is appropriately followed by a hearing in which a series of accusations are brought against Central Pacific railroad at a hearing in the House of Representatives. After a lengthy recital regarding the steep donations made to the company from a variety of state and federal bodies, the speaker reveals that the company had committed fraud by embellishing the projected costs of their operations and had also bribed a plethora of politicians to not speak against them. The speaker, Mr. Brannan, summarizes all the ways "…these gentlemen *cheated* the Government by presenting

false statements of the cost of constructing the Central Pacific Railroad, and in other ways, they *cheated* the stockholders of the railroad by issuing *to themselves* the stock, and appropriating other subsidies, which should have been distributed *pro rata* among all the stockholders" (Ruiz de Burton 192, 193). Ruiz de Burton also manages to lucidly assert that if any such deplorable actions were "perpetrated by a poor man…would send him to the penitentiary" (Ruiz de Burton, 193). Rodríguez accredits her foresight as well, with relation to the issues of capitalist industrialization: "Although *The Squatter and the Don* appeared in 1885, it was already wrestling with the conflicting demands of the modern age, focusing its diatribes, for example, one a railroad monopoly--the default icon for modernity-- and also insisting on a mythic integration of mercantilist and political ideals within the U.S. nation state" (Rodríguez 212). Once again, Ruiz de Burton audaciously accuses the supposedly blind justice system of its inequities and its allegiance to capital over the people it supposes to protect. This accusation ends up a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the railroad is allowed to continue and ultimately complete its construction in spite of its egregious fraudulence.

A hard-fought legal battle which became the backdrop for most of the conflict in *The Squatter and the Don* reaches its bitter conclusion with the defeat of the Mariano family and the death of its patriarch. Even before the land is officially lost, Don Mariano suddenly falls ill and, surrounded by those he loves, still curses the U.S. legislators for caving to their self-interests and failing to serve the values they had sworn to uphold:

> "'Papa, darling, can't we do something to relieve you?' asked Mercedes. He shook his head and whispered:
>
> "Too late! The sins of our legislators!'" (Ruiz de Burton, 304).

The corporate goliath's takeover of the land was inevitable by that point, but Don Mariano's serves a more symbolic purpose. It is the death of the humble Mexican American, thrust into a precarious position against his will, who sought only peace and fairness in the face of oppressive, tyrannical, and destructive ignorance. So too does it symbolize the defeat of the common man, as an unholy marriage of corrupt corporatism and unfettered capitalism commences its chokehold on all facets of American democracy. The story of remaining members of the late Mariano family ends with them fleeing their doomed San Diego estate and residing with the now husband-and-wife Clarence and Mercedes in San Francisco (Rodríguez 212).

Thus, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton ends *The Squatter and the Don* on a bittersweet note. In many ways, our heroes are defeated. Their former home is lost, corruption and corporate greed have prevailed, and the fate of countless others like them hangs in jeopardy. Still, there is a sense of closure in Clarence and Mercedes' marriage. The story serves largely as a scathing critique of the systemic discrimination and injustice levied against the vulnerable Mexican American people in the aftermath of the war, and Ruiz de Burton is widely effective in doing so and bringing attention of said injustices to the attention of the wider public. But there is also a message of hope to be harvested from her work. Like her real-life relationship, the triumph of the love shared by Clarence and Mercedes is one of a triumph against the odds. Even in an America that, as we have seen discussed by Reginald Horsman and played out in the pages of *Joaquín Murieta*, seems hellbent on division, exclusivity, prejudice, and the preservation of preexisting Anglo supremacist social order, love between people of two different worlds can still prevail. The world beyond the final pages of *The Squatter and the Don* are plagued with doubts and anxieties over a growingly uncertain future, and while further suffering is all but inevitable,

it is the power of love, cliché as it may seem, which imbues in readers that sense that the future is may only be as dark as we choose to make it.

The Poetry of the Dispossessed

As we have seen, freehand writing in the forms of both short stories and novels such as *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* and *The Squatter and the Don* have served as invaluable literary tools in relaying a sentiment that was felt invariably among Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in a postwar society. The same people who struggled to properly put into words after so much had been stripped from them and the population had been afflicted with such an immense deal of trauma. Mexicans sought meaning in a reality that seemed meaningless, and while these literary works may not have completely sealed the gaping wound that persists as a result of the war, it certainly aided in giving a voice to the voiceless, both songs of catharsis. These stories have secured their place in the literature of two worlds, but it would be folly to overlook the works of poetry which arose from both the U.S. and Mexico at this crucial historical turning point as well, especially given the new insights they offer that some of the lengthier literary works do not, conveying ideas in a way perhaps on the poetic format is capable of. The format of the following poems aligns much more closely with the *corrido* from the previous chapter than with the other, more prosaic texts I have explored thus far. The format of the *corrido*, like poetry, facilitates public singing, or speaking, and is therefore far more accessible to the general public than something like *The Squatter and the Don*, given the boundaries of literacy and education.

The war had ended, the notorious treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been ratified, and the Mexican people were, understandably, overwrought with fear, anger, and confusion. Looking for a scapegoat and some rationale as to how they could have been devastated so swiftly, they "blamed the United States, they blamed opposing Mexican factions, and they blamed themselves

as they struggled to explain a profound challenge to their nation and to their own identities" (Rodríguez 155). Given the wave of emotions that washed over the entire nation, it is curious how few Mexicans turned to literature and poetry, especially when compared to their northern neighbors, the supposed victors.

The lack of postwar literature, however, did not mean that changes were not being made in the shared Mexican identity. Mexico's resounding defeat in the war forced a collective introspection among its people, especially liberals with a propensity towards social reform. Thus, the 1850's became an age of sweeping reform, *La Reforma* as it would come to be known, in which Mexicans were spurred to embrace a more progressive-minded national identity and way of thinking, lest they suffer even further disassociation (Rodríguez 157, 158). Ironically, Mexico's loss served as a necessary catalyst in their journey towards a national self-consciousness. Mexico had existed as an independent nation for multiple decades by this point, but they had lacked a conflict on this scale that would force them to assess their values and beliefs. "Who are we, really?" was a question commonly poised by Mexican scholars and intellectuals. America claims to uphold the values of freedom, liberty, and democracy, but they have clearly failed to uphold these values. Put bluntly,

> "The United States had violated Mexican rights and Mexican sovereignty as well as Mexican territory. In essence, the Anglo Americans had failed to behave as the greatest nation among nations, whereas Mexico, a true republic, understood the importance of international diplomacy, respect, and temperance…the intensity of these sentiments throughout the Mexican press suggests how the image of a righteous Mexico victimized–practically betrayed—by a ruthless and hypocritical northern neighbor had a poetically powerful and ideologically penetrating impact" (Rodríguez 162, 163).

The Mexican population at large believed a founding figure like George Washington, barely half a decade-deceased, would have been disgusted with what America had become. Was it now Mexico's duty to assume that mantle? A disruption such as the war, brutal as it was, was the first major step in making Mexico more than it was before, a land of people who wanted Spain out of their affairs but lacked a collective guidance as to what their next step should be. From 1821 to 1848, Mexico was a land of people without a unifying cause. The war changed that, and it started with poetry.

For the artists who wished to heal Mexico after the war, it was important to them that the population dwell not on grief, but pride in a battle well-fought. Guillermo Prieto was one such artist who "worked to transform the grief of a nation into a foundational moment… [he] reimagined the defeat as a turning point in a larger story. In this, [Prieto] wrote in accordance with a general sense in the 1850's that Mexico's loss revealed the need to reform Mexican society and start anew" (Rodríguez 158). Artists such as Prieto recognized that the agony felt by Mexico, forced to reckon with having their vulnerability laid bare before them by an aggressive nation with whom they would continue to share a border, and he knew that the feeling could be molded into a positive tool for change rather than a mucky, wallowing pit that encouraged guilt, immobility, and shame.

Guillermo Prieto first moved to reconcile Mexico's loss by reminding her people that they did not simply give up and allow America to walk over them, and to act as though this were the case would be a disservice to the fallen soldiers who fought valiantly for Mexico, until their dying breaths. They believed in the country, Prieto asserted, so why shouldn't we, the survivors? Prieto masterfully doles out this reminder in his 1849 poem *¡A Mi Patria!* (To My Homeland!):

"And I with pride shall submit to your presence
The names of your sons, oh! of those
Who are not longer brightened by the sun of existence!
Like sacred lamps, those names
I shall offer at your altars, like incense
Shall be the perfume of their virtues" (Prieto, 208)

The most notable part about this excerpt is the implication of sacrifice. There is a process at work here, in which the writer gives purpose to the fallen. They are not men sent to die out on a battlefield, they are virtuous sacrifices, whose lives have paved the way for the future of Mexico. It seems he is speaking directly to a personification of the country of Mexico, breathing life into it. He speaks of the names of his fallen comrades with the highest of esteem, comparing the names of the dead to "sacred lamps" and crafting a metaphorical incense made purely of the virtues of these men. Poems like this are also necessary for a grieving nation, as they could not memorialize these names in celebration of a victory in the war like the United States did, works such as these provided some solace and closure to fill the void of defeat; let it be known that Mexico may have suffered losses, but those losses were not in vain.

I should be clear, while not all of Prieto's poems concern themselves *specifically* with the U.S. invasion, but those that do are still primarily intended to serve as a memorial, and are more centered on providing a closure to the anguish that comes with dealing with the loss of lives. In this sense, they are not as high-spirited as some of his other poems which do not explicitly relate to the war, but rather to the vital spirit of Mexican soldiers in general. These works can certainly be interpreted as pertaining to the U.S. invasion, but as virtually all of Prieto's readers at the time were familiar with the details of the war, having lived through it, to have included such

references would have been redundant and subtracted from Prieto's message of hope, progress, and national unity. Though the values Prieto espouses and praises in his poetry are undoubtedly framed with the war as its backdrop, that struggle, to him, is simply a moment in what will be a long, storied history of Mexico. His true praises go to the nation and the people who make that nation what it is. Prieto rejects outright references to war and strife, opting rather to focus on broad values which can be observed by those who have given some part of themselves to the country in some way. As with his invasion poetry, sacrifice is a recurring theme. A brief excerpt from this "praise poetry" from Prieto reads:

> "The breath of death took to heaven,
> You, do you hear me, Luis? And you, Martínez
> Exemplar of grandeur and nobility,
> Of your parents' glory and honor,
>
> "Such were you, Frontera, illustrious
> Whose tomb radiates light in my country
> Noble soldier, whom eternal fame
> Justly rescued from oblivion's dust[3]" (Prieto, 208)

It is not confirmed if Prieto refers to any real figure when referring to the names in these poems, but in a way it does not matter. There is a ubiquity to the way he praises the valiance of the men of whom he speaks, as if any Mexican is capable of being a Luis or a Martínez or a Frontera. There is also a component to Prieto's poetry, which we as readers are offered a glimpse of here, and that is the aspect of the poetry which deals with *machismo*, a concept

[3] Both selections of the poetry of Guillermo Prieto translated from their original Spanish by Jaime Javier Rodríguez of the University of North Texas

referring to an overly aggressive masculinity which borders on chauvinism. In this poem and in others, Prieto lists the names of men who have made the ultimate sacrifice of laying down their lives for the benefit of others. In his eyes, this appears to be the highest virtue which can be achieved, which was mostly, if not entirely, undertaken by men. Thus, Prieto embraces machismo in a way which transcends the traditional gender binary in the domestic realm: he seems to such principles as being essential to the survival of a nation and the perseverance of a continued national conscience, essentially fusing masculinity and nationalism into a singular entity. It is certainly ironic that Prieto appears to extol such a traditional philosophy amidst an otherwise progressive reformation of Mexico.

The poetry of Guillermo Prieto persists in the Mexican consciousness even to this day because of the undeniable role it played in the necessary liberalization of postwar Mexico. It managed to do so, as Rodríguez writes, through "the way praise poetry, just as it assumes a closed community of listeners, also presupposes a coherent and constant set of communal values. Like eulogies, praise poems confirm listeners' ideals as much as they pay tribute to their subjects. Through such poetry, communities reconfirm what they believe" (169). The issue prior to the war was not that the Mexican people did not hold a respectable set of morals and values, but rather that they lacked a means of expressing such sentiments without reason, or unifying cause. When struck with defeat, the void of loss demanded fulfillment, which was accomplished through communally invigorating works of art such as Prieto's poetry. Furthermore, such messages and themes found in these works were so effectively communicated. The messages and themes of these sorts of pieces resonated so greatly with the disillusioned Mexican population in that they were not something to be demonstrated by the speaker and learned by the listeners, rather, they already existed within both parties. Having

experienced the hardship of war and the sting of defeat, the shared pain was freshly printed on the hearts and minds of people across Mexico. The poetry of Guillermo Prieto may not have established this, but it did solidify these sentiments, a major step towards the liberalization of Mexico and the reconciliation of a shattered national morale.

The people south of the newly drawn U.S.-Mexico border found solace in Prieto's poetry, but when was left for those displaced Mexicans who now found themselves as American citizens? Due to the massive increase in Spanish-speaking peoples along the American Southwest, demand for newspapers published in Spanish were all but a necessity. Circulation of these newspapers, designed for the Spanish-speaking population of the new territory, found great success, and many remained in publication long after Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. Mexican Americans were desperate for something to bind them together and retain that connection to their homeland, and these newspapers were the perfect tool for that. They effectively served as a resistance to the dominant Anglo culture that perpetrated that region of the states and threatened Mexican American livelihood. Frequent publications allowed Mexican Americans to keep in contact, so to speak, with their roots, and the writers and editors behind these publications let their readers keep that fire alive in their hearts, to never forget or abandon Mexico, no matter how disconnected they may feel at times (Stavans 218, 219).

The newspapers managed to establish a reputation and credibility among their readers by featuring a variety of prominent writers, namely poets, whose short yet poignant works fit the rather narrow format of newspapers well. These writers commonly spoke on issues which pertained directly to the newspapers' primary audience of displaced, disenfranchised Mexican Americans who had grown jaded with their treatment by the dominant Anglo population and their longing for their homeland. A prominent example of this can be seen in José Rómula

Ribera's poem, *Homeland and Home*. Here, Ribera paints a contrasting picture of the beauty of Mexico which has been stripped away from him, and the wistful agony he feels through that geographical and cultural rift which the war and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo have wrought upon him and his people. He opens,

> "In my breast there's a place
> And a sanctuary in my memory
> Dedicated to the case
> That by loving it we embrace
> Alone, shamelessly, its glory" (Ribera, lines 1-5)

Immediately, Mexico's importance to Ribera is established through its residence in both the speaker's heart and mind, the two organs which are most commonly associated with emotions. Ribera encourages readers not to be ashamed of choosing to still love a country they no longer reside in, because inside, Mexico will always be a part of them. A sense of community is also invoked through the use of "we", which is shortly thereafter juxtaposed with the word "Alone". Here, Ribera attempts to create a rift between Mexican American and Anglo antagonists. Mexican Americans are the ones who feel lost and tattered after the war, but that defeat provides them with the purpose to reconstruct themselves in a bold new way. That "us vs. the world" mentality is a fantastic unifying tool, and a powerful reminder to scattered Mexican Americans that, though it may seem like it at times, they do not struggle alone.

Ribera continues with a series of metaphors used to describe the homeland, at one point comparing it to:

> "A temple, whose great essence
> Has a fascinating soul
> And neither time nor absence

Can erase its presence
For it is sculpted in the soul.

A temple of peace and calm
A shadow of that holy yen.
In his soul, the martyr's balm
When he achieves his longed for palm
And finds himself alone in heaven" (16-25)

This temple metaphor is effective for two reasons. One, because temples are often associated with religion or spirituality, which are incredibly evocative subjects and the love many people have for the homelands is as powerful as the connection many have to their faith. Two, because temples are fortuitous, and able to withstand attacks both physical and temporal. Ribera makes reference through his use of the word "soul", repeated three times in these two short stanzas. He refers to both the temple (Mexico) having soul, which would effectively make it a living, breathing being. The lines "And neither time nor absence Can erase its presence" are probably the most telling lines of these stanzas because they can be interpreted as directly referring to the plight of the Mexican American people. In a physical sense of the word, the Mexican people are absent from their homeland, and their homeland is absent from them. Furthermore, this poem was published in 1892, a significant amount of time after the war ended However, in a metaphorical, or in this case spiritual sense, that home remains in them and them in it, a sort of essentialist aspect of the nature of the Mexican people which can never be erased.

Among the most prominent contributors to newspapers such as these was a poet by the name of Luis Tafoya (1851-1922), who wrote under the pen name X.X.X. Tafoya wrote of such controversial political themes that an unsuccessful attempt was made on his life in the year 1917, though this did not deter him from continuing to pen his deepest convictions (*Latino Anthology*

of Literature 219). Torres resided in the U.S. territory which would eventually become New Mexico. Throughout his writing career, he was a steadfast advocate for New Mexico receiving statehood, because he knew that it would afford the Mexican American people at least some form of representation in the political sphere. Though they would certainly still be subject to discrimination, he knew that statehood was at least a step in the right direction.

Early on, Tafoya expressed his dissatisfaction with the U.S. government's lethargy and indifference towards New Mexico's statehood with his poem, *Same as Usual*.

> Uncle Samuel answered no,
> He won't admit us as a state
> And so to faithful New Mexico
> Congress has dealt a mighty blow
>
> It's the silver we are lacking
> Which worries this land.
> Interests have their backing,
> Our plans they will derail
> And our aspirations fail (1-10)

The first stanza of Tafoya's poem is fairly self-explanatory. Uncle Samuel (America) refuses to admit New Mexico as a state, dealing a blow to the people of New Mexico, namely, the Mexican Americans who hope to benefit from it. Congress's rationale behind said refusal is detailed more thoroughly in the second stanza. New Mexico, being a poor land with relatively scarce natural resources (silver and gold) in comparison to California, for instance, means that railroad companies have little interest in New Mexico. As we have already seen in *The Squatter and the Don*, the interests of such corporations are in direct alignment with the interests of the government, and so New Mexico remains shunned. If there was any doubt about Tafoya's

intentions here, he even makes a clever allusion to the railroad companies in the following line, "Our plans they will derail", which will leave the aspirations of the New Mexican people in shambles. Deeper into the poem, Tafoya writes,

> For half a century we all know,
> They have promised us a state
> And both earlier and late
> These promises they forego;
> Not a verbal promise, but more so
> In treaty they were all credited,
> Fully written and edited,
> Approved by two nations,
> And still these Solons
> Don't admit us a state. (15-25)

This large stanza acts as an allusion to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which gave the entirety of the New Mexico territory to the United States. From this, one would assume that acquired territories would immediately be granted statehood following the war, as was the case with California. Tafoya, and many others, interpreted the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, its terms mutually agreed upon by the two sparring nations, as all but guaranteeing statehood for New Mexico. This was not the case, of course, for the reason stated above. It is also reasonable to assume that slavery, or lack thereof, played a role in New Mexico's delayed ascension to statehood. As mentioned in Ortiz's piece, much of the U.S.'s motivation behind land acquisition was to promote the institution of slavery, but the Civil War's eruption not long after the signing of Guadalupe Hidalgo, paired with New Mexico's already lackluster number of resources, meant that the government would be even more inclined to turn the other cheek to New Mexico. They simply did not view it as a worthy economic pursuit, which again speaks volumes to the

omnipotent tide of capitalism which dominated the region during the era of expansion. He does, however, end his poem on a hopeful note, writing,

> Hope's a consolation
> To a soul that's so afflicted.
> To feel so much constricted
> You lift your eyes in search of heaven.
> Our desires did not obtain
> In the case already past
> Yet it will be won at last
> And its day come back again.
> For there really is no reason
> For Congress to deal this blow (35-44)

Here we find the motif of hope and optimism for the future, a theme ubiquitous in Mexican American writings of the time. As Tafoya so eloquently puts it, amid their ocean of loss and despair, hope was one of the only things that Mexican Americans gained from their displacement. That was their consolation prize for the doomed war that has caused so much anguish in their souls. Notice how such religion-oriented words as "soul" and "heaven" appear again here. Tafoya, like Ribera, was aware of how evocative such words are in inspiring hope in their readers. Tafoya ruefully acknowledges that the battle is lost that day, but that the sun will rise again the next, and advocates for New Mexican statehood will have their day, and it will be a victory for the Mexican American people. And despite all the frustrations and unfairness that come with congressional dealings, it was inevitable that their goals would be accomplished with enough patience and perseverance.

For those who shared in Tafoya's convictions, such patience and perseverance ended up paying off; New Mexico joined the union in 1912. In celebration, Tafoya published what would

become his most famous poem, *A Nuevo México* ("To New Mexico"), in the newspaper *La Revista de Taos*. The poem was so well received not only by Mexican Americans, but by the New Mexican populace as a whole, that it was later adopted as New Mexico's official state poem.

Levanta, Nuevo Mexico,	Lift, New Mexico
esa abatida frente	your tired forehead
Que anubla los encantos	That clouds the enchantment
de tu serena faz	of your peaceful face
y alborozado acoge corona refulgente,	and joyfully receive the bright crown
símbolo de gloria y de ventura y paz	symbol of glory, venture, and peace
Después de tantos años de lucha	After so many years of fight
y de porfía	and persistence
Tu suerte se ha cambiado	your luck has changed
y ganas de victoria,	and you gain victory
Llegando a ver por fin	Reaching up to see
el venturoso día	your fortunate day at last
Que es colmo de tu dicha y fuente	That is an overflow of happiness and the fountain
de tu gloria	of your glory
Has sido un gran empiro	You have been a a great empire
Colmado de riqueza	filled with riches
Y grandes contratiempos	and many mishaps
Tuviste que sufrir	you had to suffer
Mas ahora triunfo	but now complete triumph
plena alcanza tu entereza	reach up to your integrity
Y el premio a tu constancia	and reward for your constancy
pudiste conseguir	you were able to achieve

Tu pueblo por tres siglos	Your people for three centuries,
aislado y solitario	isolated and lonely
De nadie tuvo ayuda, de nadie protección	With help or protection from nobody
Lucho por su existencia osado y temerario	They fought for their existence, reckless and daring
Sellando con su sangre dominio y posesión	Sealing in blood their dominion and possession[4]

(Tafoya 227, lines 1-27)

The remainder of the poem continues in a similar fashion, but I believe these first four stanzas do well to encapsulate the sense of hard-fought and well-earned triumph and elation that Tafoya communicates to his fellow New Mexicans. In the first stanza, he portrays a state bruised and beaten through years of failed attempts at statehood, decades of neglect by a government which is supposed to uplift and protect it. Such struggle is related in the stanzas which follow. The plight of the people of New Mexico is virtually indistinguishable from the plight of the Mexican American people; their struggle is synonymous. Thus, the victory of New Mexico is a victory for Mexican Americans, a major stride towards becoming a respected, represented, and actualized body of the American population. Here, the reward is not intangible hope or simply the mercy to survive another day under the cruel hand of Congress. The reward is concrete, written in ink, something which cannot be so simply violated or rescinded.

More so than a winding novel or an esoteric historical document, poetry was something which most expediently allowed messages of hope and unity to reach the general public, their brief format suitable for mass-produced newspapers or public readings. Though brief, the works of poetry from figures such as Guillermo Prieto or José Rómula Ribera or Luis Tafoya are layered, giving voice to the devastated folks in both Mexico and America who felt as though something had been lost in the wake of the war (and in many ways it certainly had been). These

[4] English translation provided by the office of the New Mexico Secretary of State, Maggie Toulouse Oliver.

poems did not seek to paint reality with rose-tinted glasses, but they do offer messages of comfort in times of mounting uncertainties and anxieties. Many may have found themselves physically divorced from Mexico by hundreds of miles, in strange hostile new territory, but Mexico's spirit will forever be imprinted into the hearts and memories, a stark reminder that the will of a nation supersedes all land, time, and borders.

The true power of poetry, and the edge it gains over the lengthy prose of novels such as *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* and *The Squatter and the Don* is the fact that the most essential ideas it hopes to convey are conveyed outright. While novels like that of Ruiz de Burton are allowed several hundred pages to take more time in the development of their characters and allow the themes and ideas "room to breathe", the core themes are sometimes foregone in the eyes of those who do not read with a critical eye. Poetry, in its striking brevity, leaves no room for misinterpretation or ambiguity. Each line packs its own punch, each a unique beat with its own sentiment to convey, and for that reason it is arguably the very best means of consolidating that feeling of dispossession among a population with the greatest efficacy.

The Outside Looking In

The Mexican American War was fought between only two nations: Mexico and the United States. However, the implications of this two-state conflict managed to send ripples throughout the entire western hemisphere, and was particularly worrying to those in Latin American nations such as Mexico, who were suddenly stricken with the reality that the U.S. was not afraid to trample on Mexico; what was to stop them and their manifest destiny ideals from encroaching even further south?

José Martí is a legendary figure in Cuban history, rivalled only by the likes of gargantuan revolutionary figures Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Martí, too, was a revolutionary, who vied for a unified "Pan-America" in which all Latin nations were unified under one banner. Though he was not born until 1853, five years following the war's end, the presence of America and the consequences of their thirst for unchecked imperialism were greatly troubling for someone as pro-Latin America as Martí. His 1892 essay, "Our America", has become a cornerstone of writing on the subject of anti-imperialism and unfettered American intervention in the western hemisphere. It may have been published decades after the war, but it is very clearly a product of it, a testament to how impactful the invasion was.

Martí was a born revolutionary who criticized imperialism from a young age. While spending his early life in Cuba, he was an outspoken advocate for his homeland's independence against its Spanish rulers. His writings led him to be exiled from Cuba by the Spanish government, a move which would only serve to further radicalize Martí. While in exile, his poems and editorials revolved around themes of liberation, independence, and anti-

imperialism. His ultimate goal was to see his utopian dream of a Pan-Latin America be made manifest, a land free from all Anglo imperial influence.

Martí's famous essay *Our America* was published in *El Partido Liberal* (The Liberal Party), a progressive Mexican newspaper, in 1892, while he was living in Mexico City. Brief yet poignant, it acts as a call to action for the Mexican people, arguing that the United States has both the ability and the will to completely eradicate Mexico's people and culture, and for this reason, they cannot remain ignorant and complacent in America's power grabs any longer. Now, it must be noted that Martí is not speaking on physical terms here. He is no fool, and knows that Mexico's forces stand no chance of upending America's military might, as has already been proven. Rather, the battle must be fought on ideological grounds, a war of ideas. Martí writes, "Trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stone. A cloud of ideas is a thing no armored prow can smash through. A vital idea set ablaze before the world at the right moment can, like the mystic banner of the last judgment, stop a fleet of battleships." In principle, the power of the mind surpasses the power of any firearm and the fortitude of strong ideas trumps the defensive capabilities of any trench or barrier.

The first step in achieving this goal is through unity, both large-scale and small-scale. Martí argues, believing that Mexican brothers and sisters must put aside their petty squabbling and join together against the mounting American menace, "Hometowns that are still strangers to one another must hurry to become acquainted, like men who are about to do battle together. Those who shake their fists at each other like jealous brothers quarreling over a piece of land or the owner of a small house who envies the man with a better one must join hands and interlace them until their two hands are as one." Martí believes that this love of materials things like houses and plots of land over compatriots is a toxic trait which America has embraced to a

fault, and this lust for money and power is among the prime catalysts driving the disease of imperialism. He specifically speaks on the American elites in this regard, stating that they have become so drunk on their own power that they believe they have the right to alter nations as they deem fit: "The haughty man thinks that because he wields a quick pen or vivid phrase the earth was made to be his pedestal…" For reasons such as this, Martí knowingly treads a thin line in his assertions, because he advocates for ideals of strength, yet knows that such strength is a slippery slope into tyranny. In this aspect, America serves as a case study. Its colonies wanted strength to defeat Britain, and once they did, that thirst for strength remained unchecked, eventually manifesting itself as the Trail of Tears, the Mexican American war, and atrocities still to come.

Also prominent in a piece by someone who holds such strong patriotic beliefs as Martí is a scathing disdain for those who do not share in such beliefs. To him, to not have a connection to one's homeland provides no reason to continue living; patriotism is an essential aspect of humanity: "Only runts whose growth was stunted will lack the necessary valor, for those who have no faith in their land like men born prematurely. Having no valor themselves, they deny that other men do. Their puny arms, with bracelets and painted nails, the arms of Madrid or of Paris, cannot manage the lofty tree and so say the tree cannot be climbed" (Martí). To Martí, these are the types of pessimists who are holding the Latin American continent from realizing its potential. He believes them to be the kinds of people to submit like dogs to nations such as America and Spain, to allow themselves to be trampled by the boot of imperialism. Such beliefs must be cast out, Martí argues, be it through education or through force, if the Pan-Latin dream is to be made manifest.

Martí's theory is that compassion for one's own nation is conceived foremost through compassion for family and neighbor, that those who fail their ailing members of their nation have failed the nation itself. "These sons of carpenters who are ashamed their father was a carpenter…these delinquents who disown their sick mother and leave her alone in her sickbed!" Martí seethes, "Which one is truly a man, he who stays with his mother to nurse her through her illness, or he who forces her to work somewhere out of sight, and lives off her sustenance in corrupted lands…cursing the bosom that bore him?" Again, his disdain for this archetype is applied to faithless Americans as well. Martí's critiques here are, expectedly, gnawingly harsh, perhaps even more so because he takes the angle of self-perceived Anglo superiority, and how such men on that side of the fence are unforgivably complicit in horrific projects of racism. He reserves this animosity for all who do not have the will to defend their homeland and its people but aims it especially at Mexicans who have taken up residence in America and essentially sided with the enemy.

Moving on in his essay and his critique of the United States, Martí lays out his philosophy for how a government must operate in a fair, free, and unified society, and why he believes America has failed to establish such a government. He says, "To govern well. One must attend closely to the reality of the place that is governed… The government must be born from the country. The form of the government must be in harmony with the country's natural constitution. The government is no more than an equilibrium among the country's natural elements" (Martí). Within the context of the U.S., one can assume that when Martí speaks of the "reality" of a country, he speaks of the United States constitution and its origins as a nation of colonists seeking freedom from a tyrannical state. The goal of the founding fathers was to establish a governing entity which would be controlled by the people, and sadly, that dynamic

has shifted since the country's conception. The elite ruling class in the United States has corrupted the founding principles of the office, reducing the constitution to a mere symbol of the nation whilst trampling over its mandates in the name of their self-serving experiments in imperialism and genocide.

What is to blame for such poor governance? Martí believes a primary suspect to be American universities, which fail to teach students how to properly govern. "How can our governors emerge from the universities when there is not a single university in America that teaches the most basic element of the art of governing, which is the analysis of all that is unique to the peoples of America?" Martí argues, "Our youth go out into the world wearing Yankee- or French-colored glasses and aspire to rule by a guesswork a country they do not know. Those unacquainted with the rudiments of politics should not be allowed to embark on a career in politics".

Martí's advocacy for the learning of all the unique aspects reserved by one's nation before it is to be properly governed is a good argument for social liberalization, akin to the beliefs of someone like Prieto. Critical, holistic introspection, the understanding of one's own strengths and weaknesses, is necessary before further change to the country and to the rest of the world can be made. After all, how is a country able to form its own identity if they have no clue who they actually are? In Martí's mind, if American leaders had been properly educated on this subject and undergone such an assessment, the invasion of Mexico, or at least the subjugation of Mexican Americans after the war, would never have happened, because of the people it ended up hurting and the damage it ended up doing to American self-assuredness. He sees ignorance as being directly correlated with tyranny, as nobody truly versed in the story of America would act in such an un-American manner: "To know a country and govern it with accordance with that

knowledge is the only way of freeing it from tyranny" (Martí). Despite all the fear and resentment Martí harbors towards the U.S., he acknowledges that she herself is little more than another victim of tyranny, differing from a nation such as Mexico only in that it is eating itself from the inside out as opposed to the other way around.

Aside from failure of universities to educate, Martí believes that at least some portion of the U.S. despotic nature may be a holdover from its subjugation by Great Britain: "America began enduring and still endures the weary task of reconciling the discordant and hostile elements it inherited from its perverse, despotic colonizer with the imported forms and ideas that have, in their lack of local reality, delayed the advent of a logical form of government". This is a scary theory because of the viral nature of tyranny it supposes. If Britain managed to "infect" America with imperialistic, despotic tendencies, what was stopping nations victimized by America to fall victim to the same disease? The more countries which could be saved from the power-hungry hand of America, Martí believed, the better.

Martí closes out his piece with a brief meditation on race, and how the narrow mentalities and prejudices have opened the path to so much destruction and despair, while at the same time advocating for a radical embrace of love and acceptance of one's fellow man. "There is no racial hatred, because there are no races," he writes, "Sickly, lamp-lit minds string together and rewarm the library-shelf races that the honest traveler and cordial observer seek in vain in the justice of nature, where the universal identity of man leaps forth in victorious love and turbulent appetite" (Martí).

Martí paints the reality of the U.S.'s effect on Latin America over the past century with a dark brush, but he makes sure to end his essay on a hopeful note. He believes creativity and originality to be what makes nations great; such things give a nation an identity and sense of

purpose. Once a nation comes to recognize its own strengths, talents, and offerings on the national stage, it will come to view other nations as its equals rather than inferiors, and utopia will come about. Even given the contentious history between the U.S. and Latin American nations such as Mexico, Martí maintains that there is hope for reconciliation: "The disdain of the formidable neighbor who does not know her is our America [Latin America]'s greatest danger, and it is urgent- for the day of the visit- that her neighbor come to know her, and quickly, so that he will not disdain her. Out of ignorance, he [America] may perhaps begin to covet her [Latin America], but when he knows her, he will remove his hands from her in respect".

Martí's ideas and calls for a Pan-Latin America unity found a considerable audience among Latino intellectuals, one of them being the Mexican writer José Vasconcelos, who would go on to make an unsuccessful bid for the Mexican presidency just a few years after the publishing of his landmark work, *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race) in 1925. This historical piece echoes many of the sentiments found in *Our America*, even electing to expand upon Martí's sentiments by portraying the entire history of the post-1492 western hemisphere as a struggle between white Anglos and Latin peoples, descending from Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. "Our age," Vasconcelos begins in reference to the western hemisphere as we understand it today, "became, and continues to be, a conflict of Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism; a conflict of institutions, aims, and ideals" (Vasconcelos A86). He moves forward, bemoaning the current state of Latin America as willingly subservient to the U.S. through their insistence on adhering to national identities, while remaining ignorant of the necessity for Latin unity as a means of survival in the face of oppressors. "We [Latin Americans] are going through times of despair," Vasconcelos writes, "We continue to lose not only national sovereignty, but moral power." His mention of moral power here is in reference to the moral superiority the

relatively peaceful Latin America subcontinent reserved in relation to the U.S., but the fact that national separation and an unwillingness to embrace a collective Latin identity means that such moral superiority is null and will soon be trampled by Anglo forces who wish to impose their own moral code. He continues, "Far from feeling united in face of disaster, our determination is dispersed in search of small and vain goals…Despoiled of our previous greatness, we boast of an exclusively national patriotism and we do not see the dangers that threaten our race as a whole. We deny ourselves to each other" (Vasconcelos A86, A87).

Vasconcelos relays his disappointment in the inaction of the Latin countries following a series of events which placed the Anglo race on top of the western hemisphere, in both the literal and figurative sense. The single biggest event which he cites as advancing Anglo presence in the western hemisphere was the ceding of a massive area of land by Napoleon Bonaparte to America via the Louisiana purchase. According to Vasconcelos, "Without Napoleon, the United States would not exist as a world empire, and Louisiana, still French, would have to be part of the Latin America confederation" (A89). This acquisition of land had grave consequences for the future of the Anglosphere, as it immediately rendered the state of Texas vulnerable to the Anglos and ripe for conflict, and the ever-expanding Anglo people, united under the ideology of manifest destiny, were able to bypass a vast swath of Central and Southern land without having to fire a single shot. To both Martí and Vasconcelos, the invasion of Mexico was the first and among the largest and most egregious examples of U.S. imperialism and disregard for the sovereignty and autonomy of Latin nations, but for the latter specifically, the Louisiana purchase was where the rubber truly met the road.

One of Vasconcelos' biggest lamentations about Latin geosphere, and what he views as the biggest roadblock to actualization Pan-Latin utopia he and Martí share, is the division

inherent to the nation states which comprise Latin America, especially when the Anglo people are united through a collective set of ideals, principles, and aspirations under the American flag. "We ignore the contrast presented by Anglo-Saxon unity in opposition to the anarchy and solitude of the Ibero American emblems" (Vasconcelos A87). In his mind, the concept of nationalism is in large part outdated and ineffective if Latin America is to set itself in opposition to the states. He writes, "The present state of civilization still imposes patriotism on us as a necessity for the defense of material and moral interests; but it is indispensable for this patriotism to seek vast and transcendental aims". To Vasconcelos, pride in one's country is a mere steppingstone on the path towards his ultimate vision. Still, he recognizes how potent a tool unbridled patriotism can be in molding strong collectives, and so he acknowledges that such a power would be best harnessed through the shared glorification of Latin America as a whole, and not simply the small nations that comprise it.

For José Martí, José Vasconcelos, and other Latin Americans who wish to eradicate the boundaries that divide their country, both physically and metaphorically, America has ironically served as a unifying force. Looming overhead as an ever-present obstacle to the development and expansion of Mexico and other Latin nations, the U.S. unchecked hunger for expansion and dominance has left many with the same feelings that these two writers express. The Mexican American war has made it clear that one Latin nation stands little hope of taming the American beast. The unification of and consolidation of power among these nations is not merely a solution to a problem, it is the only solution to the existential crisis that threatens their people, land, ideas, cultures, and future. On a surface level, it may seem trivial to attempt to link a Cuban exile living in the 20th century who clamors for a utopian pan-Latin American continent to the American invasion of Mexico, but there is a message in the words of Martí and

Vasconcelos which are echoed throughout all the works insofar discussed. Just as Joaquín Murieta assembled a gang of bandits to avenge his brother, just as Don Mariano joined his friends and family in fighting legal forces to the bitter end, and just as Luis Tafoya locked arms with his Mexican American brethren in a fight for political representation, Martí and Vasconcelos simply state what has already been made clear throughout the course of this thesis. Unity and cohesion are not simply *a* solution to the threat that American imperialism poses, it is the *only* solution. The invasion of Mexico may have appeared to have only existed as a binary struggle, but in reality, the conflict created ripples which threatened the entirety of Latin America and the western hemisphere, and the combined might of the remaining western hemisphere is the only hope for to tame the northern goliath.

Conclusion

The variety of texts which have been examined throughout my thesis, ranging from prose to poetry to factual accounts to retrospective historical assessments, demonstrate beyond question the critical nature of the Mexican American war, be it through the continued struggle for identity in the millions of Mexican Americans who call the United States their home today or through the restless anxiety sparked among American essentialists in the matter of foreign assertions of power and the role of the U.S. in militaristic matters. The Mexican American war, relatively short in comparison to many wars and undeniably one-sided, created a ripple effect not only between the U.S. and Mexico, but throughout the entire western hemisphere and, to this day, the specter of that brief yet meteoric conflict continues to loom over Americans and Mexicans, Anglos and *mestizaje*, and all others living in the vast western hemisphere.

So, why is a conflict of such gravity covered so scarcely in American schools? A wealth of information which can be theorized, cited, and expanded upon, but ultimately, I believe the answer to be quite simple, and quite sobering: optics. The invasion of Mexico makes the United States look like the bad guys. In middle school and high school history textbooks across the nation, the Mexican American war is universally overshadowed by the American Civil War, not simply because the Civil War was of great importance, but because the Civil War was fought over a righteous cause. It is not an indictment of one's nation to teach of brave men who sacrificed their lives for the abolition of slavery and the freedom of a group marginalized peoples. The northern victory in the Civil War was the first stepping stone for African Americans towards achieving the same legal and social standing as white Americans, and as this civil fight rages on in the 21st century, the Civil War remains a cornerstone of this racial

progress, a war that Americans can be proud to claim. For this reason, it is even more interesting why the Mexican American war is not covered to a greater extent, considering another significant group of marginalized people are implicated in that war's consequences. While the Civil War moved black Americans forward, the Mexican American war pulled Mexican Americans back, robbing them of their national identity and cruelly branding them as second-class citizens.

No matter how you slice it, there was no noble or even permissible cause for the Mexican American War. Whether it was the preservation of slavery, the expansion of the Anglo race, or the further accumulation of wealth and resources, all at the expense of a less privileged group of people, our contemporary retrospective is unsurprisingly marred with shame, guilt, and regret. Such an intense mixture of emotions leads us to overlook this war, be it deliberately or subconsciously. It is certainly an easy way out, one which enables white America to absolve itself of responsibility through sheer omission and ignorance as opposed to an uncomfortable confrontation with a lamentable past. This sort of introspection, a coming to terms with the fact that America stood in stark opposition to the very values it extols, is a difficult thing for patriotic Americans to grapple with. As a country, we may still not be ready to reconcile with ourselves, our past actions, and our undeniably dark history.

In researching and scouring through literature born from the U.S. Mexico border conflict, it has become apparent to me specifically how important an education in the literature of times such as these plays a role in curating a more empathetic, cosmopolitan view of the world. Literature, put plainly, is the antidote to dogmatic nationalism. Often, the propaganda of one's nation is difficult to discern when one lives and breathes it every day, but the exploration of texts such as the one's detailed throughout my thesis, chronicling the trials and tribulations,

struggles and hardships, losses and defeats of real people directly influenced by America's past actions, are sure to broaden the cultural horizons of any reader and make them more perceptive to the unjust transgressions of their own nations. It is for this reason that, while I believe the United States has a responsibility to devote more time to the discussion of the Mexican American history through textbooks, it would be even more fruitful to go one step further and discuss the literature which arose from such a significant conflict, which portrays the hopes and lamentations of those who actually lived through it far better than any research-centric text is capable of.

While the voice of curricula may remain passive, the voices of those who suffered through the war and those who continue to suffer consequently ring loud, and they must not be ignored. Lest we as Americans forget the dangers and observable consequences of imperialism and wanton land expansion, both for others and for ourselves, monumental tribulations and horrors of the Mexican American war must be made apparent to those who will one day be sitting in the same seats as those in power today, or similarly devastating oversights may curse history to repeat itself.

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