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Are Pachucos Subalterns?: Crime, Liminality, and the Uncanny in Early Chicano Literature

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ABSTRACT: This article studies the novels of Daniel Venegas, Jovita González, and Américo Paredes that they wrote between 1928-1938. Indigeneity, marriage, liminality, and volition are major themes in the works of each author, all of which analyze the state of Chicanos in the Southwest during the first decades after the Mexican Revolution. While their plots and characters differ, they are all rooted in the conflict between First Nations and colonial settlers and had to grapple with the existence of pachucos. Because it was necessary for pachucos and pachucas to mediate between their Mexican-born relatives and Euro-Americans, they best represented the state of Mexican America during that era.

KEYWORDS: Indigeneity, la chicanada, crime and punishment, liminality, settler-colonialism

From 1925 until 1938, three writers named Daniel Venegas, Jovita González, and Américo Paredes wrote novels that analyze the state of Mexican emigrants and their children living in the U.S. Southwest in the decades after the revolution. The characters of their novels exhibited lingering effects from the U.S.-Mexico War, discrimination due to legal status, and the pressure and incentives for emigrants' children to assimilate. Despite their many differences, both indigenous and Tejano characters in their novels find themselves sharing a state of liminality. The pachucos, or cholos, represented the chicanos' state of liminality as well as anyone, because they had the uncanny ability to mediate between Mexican and Anglo-American communities. For the pachucos, daily life entailed traversing not just distinct environments and languages but also mores and customs from either side of the border.

Despite their distinctive plots, characters, settings, and categories of analysis, each author sought to understand the *pachucos* either explicitly or as a subtext. These specific efforts were part of their larger explanation of the state of Mexican America after the revolution. Some of the major themes in their novels are indigeneity, marriage, liminality, and volition. While each of these themes poses a significant issue or question about the motivations of each character, is rooted in conflicts between First Nations and colonial settlers. At critical junctures, both indigenous and Tejano characters must choose between strategies of resistance and accommodation. Though the ways each character either resists or accommodates differ for each novel, their actions are all responses to their liminal state.

These novels were, for a long time, unavailable to scholars. In fact, the novels of González and Paredes remained unpublished for approximately half a century. This article owes much to the efforts of a group of scholars who labored to recover the writings of Latino novelists that had been lost until the 1980s. Because of their work, it is now much easier to access both of González's works, which she titled *Caballero* and *The Dew on the Thorn*, and Paredes' *George Washington Gómez*. The recovery project allowed Latina and Latino intellectuals to analyze these novels in relation to those of contemporaneous authors such as Venegas' *Las Aventuras de Don Chipote*. If those scholars had not undertaken the recovery project, it would not have been possible to write this article.

For many reasons, the post-revolutionary era was a critical and highly contingent transition period between the Porforiato and the PRI regime that caused rather contradictory effects to manifest in Mexico. As certain sectors of the Mexican economy improved during the 1920s, popular social movements demanded the enforcement of the provisions of the new constitution that mandated reforms in labor, land redistribution, national ownership of resources, and church-state relations. As agricultural, mining, and oil prices plummeted towards the end of the decade, Elias Plutarco Calles responded by consolidating power over the national government during the Maximato. The national government eventually established an uneasy truce with popular movements during the sexenio of Lázaro Cárdenas through a state-led labor organization called Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) that lasted through the postwar period.

Despite a lingering and pervasive sense of uncertainty" and eliminate the dependent clause "apparently unmolested by the protracted political crisis, Mexican artists used a variety of mediums such as painting, literature, and later film to better understand the meaning of Mexican national identity, which was a goal they shared with the so-called "indigenista" intellectuals. By the 1940s, the literary critic Octavio Paz and others were taking the changing meanings of "machismo" in contemporary Mexican society as their subject of inquiry. In *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950), Paz analyzed both the collapse of the Mexica Empire during the sixteenth century and the *pachucos* (who were also known as "Zoot Suiters") who emerged in East Los Angeles during the decades after the revolution. For Paz, both the history of Spanish colonization in Mesoamerica and the present state of Mexican-American youth in the U.S. were essential for understanding *lo mexicano*. Some scholars such as Carlos Monsiváis argued later in the century that it was this "golden age" of cinema during the 1940s and 1950s that the controversial, "modern" notion of machismo originated.

If the works of Venegas, González, and Paredes were part of this larger effort by intellectuals to examine the crisis of masculinity in post-revolutionary Mexico, those authors wrote also had to answer an additional set of questions related to emigration. While the novelists wrote about typical themes related to immigration stories like language acquisition, family unification, and educational attainment, they also had to confront that which was particular about Mexican migration to the U.S. By some estimates, approximately 1,500,000 Mexicans emigrated north of the border from 1900 until 1940. The major issues these authors considered in their writing were the U.S.-Mexico War, mass deportations and repatriations, and segregation in the U.S. Southwest. It turned out that sharing a land border with the U.S. was a peculiar experience indeed.

As is true for any writer, Venegas, González, and Paredes' personal background and circumstances while living in the U.S. had a tremendous influence on their work. Previously, Venegas had worked as a writer for two Spanish-language newspapers in Los Angeles, *El Heraldo de México* and *La Opinión*. At various times during his stay in the U.S., he also worked for the Southern Pacific railroad in the Southwest, led a theater company, and published a periodical, *El Malcriado*, which was also his writing pseudonym. *El Malcriado* was, of course, also the name of the United Farm Workers' official newspaper during the 1960s and 1970s. While reporting for *El Heraldo* and *La Opinión*, Venegas collected testimonies from many Mexican emigrants living in the U.S. Soon after the publication of his novel in *El Heraldo* during 1928, Venegas joined one of the first groups of *repatriados*, who, in this case, were mostly white-collar writers from Mexico.

Many scholars consider *Las Aventuras* among the first, if not the first, chicano novel. The novel's protagonist, Don Chipote, is a composite character based on the emigrants Venegas encountered during the mid-1920s. After leaving his family to search for work in the U.S., Don Chipote joins a group of his "Chipotesca familia," whom the narrator describes alternatively as "braceros" or "chicanos." The story revolves around Don Chipote and the Chipotesca familia as they make the typical ride on the South Pacific from El Paso to Los Angeles in search of higher wages. It is worth noting that in Venegas' novel, the the term 'chicanos' referred to undocumented emigrants from Mexico. By the 1970s, the meaning of the term changed to include their children born in the U.S.

While Venegas wrote his novel based on the testimonies from Mexican emigrants, Jovita González used historical fiction—and most likely oral history—to understand the origins of the crisis of masculinity in South Texas. González set both of her two unpublished novels, *The Dew on the Thorn* (which remained unfinished) and *Caballero*, in Texas during the first half of the nineteenth century. Both describe how "the Border People" adjust to U.S. rule during the U.S.-Mexico War as the U.S.' victory causes a crisis in the self-image of hacendados and rancheros who live in the region. That crisis is represented best by the decline of the prominent hacendado Santiago, who is the great-grandson of the first surveyor, Ramón, who received one of the first land grants from the Spanish viceroy during the 1740s.

González evidently had much insight into the inner workings of Tejano society during the early nineteenth century. In each of her novels, plot development and character motivations are rooted in social relations between indigenous people and Spaniards living on the hacienda. While the attitudes of hacendados range from a genuine desire to educate indigenous people to unabashed racism and prejudice, social life in every hacienda is characterized more than anything by the competition for prestige among hacendados and rancheros. Though they only realize it after they lose their sovereignty, hacendados' paternalist ideology proves to be quite precarious when their self-image is contradicted by the consequences of military defeat. One of González's most provocative suggestions was that at least some Tejanos of the present might repeat the past mistakes of hacendados such as Santiago.

South Texas was home of several writers whose work during the 1930s became centerpieces of the recovery project. One of González's contemporaries was a young, cisgender Tejano named Américo Paredes. His unfinished novel, *George Washington Gómez*, describes the education of a Tejano adolescent named Guálinto—known later as George—who is comes of age during that pivotal decade. Born in Brownsville on September 3, 1915, Paredes was, like González, a descendent of Tejanos who had arrived at the end of the eighteenth century. Also like her, Paredes used historical fiction to analyze the decisions made by the novels' protagonist. However, in *George Washington Gómez*, the major event that bears its influence on the present is not the U.S.-Mexico War but rather the Mexican Revolution.

While both novels share a certain degree of historicity, *George Washington Gómez* also differed from González's work in terms of its protagonists, narrative style, and categories of analysis. Paredes' uses a nonlinear narrative that oscillates between Guálinto's formative experiences during adolescence and a critical event—the death of his father—that occurred shortly after his birth while the revolution was unfolding on both sides of the border. Paredes' novel is also notable for its reliance on psychoanalytic methods. In his story, the struggle between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza exists only within the mind of Guálinto. Similarly to González's question about the impact of the U.S.-Mexico War on the collective psyche of the Border People, Paredes asks whether his decisions as an adult are at least in part the result of unresolved traumas from his adolescence.

Each of the Tejano novelists wrote about people who had become accustomed not only to living in a region that was located between two states but also two sets of competing narratives about history and national identity. Within each of those sets of narratives were also different understandings about the causes of racism in society. Despite being accustomed to living in that region, Venegas' and theirs works suggest that many were still trying to make sense of the particular experiences of Chicanos in the Southwest. The arrival of many Mexican emigrants after the revolution did not change this question as much as increase the stakes of answering it, and the same was true for the emergence of pachucos who lived in the cities and towns of the region. What was each author's theory about the circumstances that their indigenous and Tejano protagonists confronted? What was the significance of the pachucos for them?

Any attempt to understand Mexican history and politics must consider the place of indigenous people. In each novel, indigeneity is never presented in a vacuum. Rather, it exists in conflict with settler-colonialism. Indeed, it is this continuing conflict that drives plot development and causes any notion of a shared national identity to be inherently tenuous at best. The ways that those conflicts between indigeneity and settler-colonialism become apparent vary for each novel. Between them, the major sites of conflict between indigeneity and Euro-American colonizers are family unification, authority on the hacienda, and the individual psyche of Guálinto/George. Moreover, these conflicts over the meaning of national identity are linked with labor, migration, religion, and citizenship. Yet in every novel, the meaning of national identity is characterized by the conflict between indigeneity and settler-colonialism

To best describe how each author defines indigeneity in relation to labor, migration, religion, and citizenship, it is worth making a short digression on the specific post-revolutionary moments in which each author wrote their stories. Venegas published his story after a series of emigrations by Mexicans to the U.S. from 1923 until 1927. In fact, Don Chipote's journey from El Paso to Los Angeles on the Southern Pacific is one that many Mexican emigrants made after crossing the border in those years. In contrast, González and Paredes attempted to publish their novels during the labor upheavals of the mid-1930s. In South Texas, agricultural workers– first onion pickers and then pecan shellers—attempted to organize unions throughout the decade. These efforts culminated with the massive pecan shellers' strike that occurred in San Antonio from January until May of 1938, for which the Communist labor organizer Emma Tenayuca became the most recognizable leader. Both the epilogue of *George Washington Gómez* and the refusal of several printers to publish *Caballero* from 1937-8 need to be understood in the context of these organizing drives by agricultural workers in South Texas during the 1930s.

Evidently, contemporary events that pertained to migration and labor impacted the questions that each author attempted to answer in their novels. While its significance varies for each, the metaphor of the family is essential for understanding the definition of national identity. For obvious reasons, the metaphor of family does not represent the inner conflict between indigeneity and empire adequately. Even so, family reunification functions as a plot device that is also a metaphor for the well-being of the polity. In other words, the changing state of families represents for each author the well-being of the community they represent. Between the three authors, the well-being of characters' families can refer to either the future of indigenous people or Tejanos. For each author, the changing state of families represents the well-being of the community more generally. The reunification or division of a character's family represents the future well-being of whichever polity is signified by that character.

Though he wrote earlier than González and Paredes, Venegas' story differs in a number of other, important ways. Of these novels, the interrelated issues of citizenship and indigeneity are most salient in Las Aventuras, since Venegas' unstated implication is that the chicanos are mostly indigenous people. Don Chipote and his fellow chicanos are subjugated to both inhumane degrees of exploitation and social and political exclusion during their time in the U.S. Venegas' unstated implication is that the chicanos are mostly indigenous people. Together, the "Chipotesca familia" encounters both ruthless Mexican contractors and people whose appearance is similar to his but do not speak or understand Spanish. The pivotal event occurs at the end when U.S. immigration officials deport Los Chipotes, which is the climax of a crisis that grows throughout the novel. Venegas presents Don Chipote's journey as a nightmarish journey that results from his contradictory state of being both indigenous and undocumented. In the U.S., the chicano migrants are both native and foreign.

Whereas neither Guálinto/George nor his U.S-born wife and child risk deportation in *George Washington Gómez*, Don Chipote is constantly reminded of his legal status throughout the novel. For Venegas, the degree of exploitation of Don Chipote and other Mexican emigrants, coupled with both their socio-political exclusion and separation from their families, was why they should return to Mexico. The fact that Venegas wrote his story based on real testimonies by Mexican emigrants makes his novel ring authentically and adds credibility to his argument. Yet their reasons for emigrating to the U.S. should not be reduced to either naiveté or being duped by dishonest labor recruiters. Rather, the negative consequences of their decision need to considered alongside those of *not* emigrating. The so-called "the income-consumption gap" in the Mexican countryside was as likely, if not more likely, to be a motivation for emigration.

For Venegas, the crucial question was whether emigration was worth the price of extreme exploitation and social and political exclusion. While chicanos of *Las Aventuras* lack citizenship, González's *Caballero* suggests that the means by which indigenous characters could achieve political inclusion was through piety. Though indigeneity and labor are also connected for González, religion and piety are essential for notions of citizenship on the hacienda in her novel. In *Caballero*, José and Tecla represent the biblical figures of Mary and Joseph, which is why Tecla gives birth to their son in their *jacal*. Though they were excluded from the competition for prestige because they are native, Christian doctrine offered them the possibility of grace in the eternal world. This, of course, was part of a much older ecclesiastical debate over how to reconcile indigeneity and Christianity. González's interpretation was strikingly similar to what left-wing Catholics later called "the preferential option for the poor."

As with the novels of Venegas and González, a major tension in Paredes' story is the relation of indigenous people in national identity. In *George Washington Gómez*, Paredes also raises the question of whether it is even possible for U.S.-born Tejanos could reconcile indigeneity and national identity. Paredes' answer to this question revolves around the individual identity of the title character. The title points to the central tension of Guálinto's individual identity, which is, in part, the result of his father's misunderstanding of U.S. history. His father, Gumersindo, named him after the independence-era general under the incorrect assumption that Washington had emancipated his slaves. Towards the end of the novel, Guálinto's learns that his nickname is a mispronunciation of the Cuauhtémoc (246). Guálinto's relationship with indigeneity is also demonstrated through his schooling, especially his memories—or lack thereof—of a student who sat next to him in Mrs. Cornelius's class, to whom he refers only as "La India." Yet it is Guálinto's decision to separate himself from Mexicans in South Texas as an adult that provides an answer to Paredes' question.

George's renunciation of indigeneity is not just an assertion of his new identity as an individual, but rather it is a decision that must be understood as particular to the post-revolutionary period. For Paredes, the future of the younger Guálinto had implications for not just Tejano youth but also the meaning of the revolution itself. Out of the latter come two competing narratives about Mexican national identity. Gumersindo and his brother (Guálinto's uncle) Feliciano, each represent one of two philosophies. Gumersindo is devoutly Catholic and fears the consequences of teaching his son to distrust Anglo-Americans. He believes in the possibility of social harmony. In contrast, Feliciano moved to northern Mexico while he was young and subsequently became an anti-clerical. Unlike his brother, "the Border Mexican knew there was no brotherhood of men" (19). This debate had as much to do—if not more—with conflicts between indigeneity and the Mexican state as those between labor and capital.

Much of the novel's plot development is driven by the tension between the worldviews of Gumersindo and the younger Feliciano. It is, tragically, George's actions as an adult that allow the older Feliciano to judge who was correct. In Part V, George returns to his hometown of Jonesville and informs his uncle that he is working in border security and counter-intelligence for the Army. Specifically, he has returned to spy on the wife of Antonio Prieto's wife, who is intended to represent the Tejana labor organizer Emma Tenayuca. In the last scene, the older Feliciano learns that George's motivation has changed from a genuine desire "lead the people" of South Texas to merely advancing his own career interests. In private, George tells him he believes the future of "Mexican greasers" will be limited to working in "unskilled" occupations. The story ends after the aging Feliciano realizes the younger Feliciano was correct.

Though their precise circumstances differ in each novel, every character's proximity to indignity is what determines more than anything their social, political, and economic constraints. Whether as constituting national identity or being "the other" to it, what they share in common is that indigeneity is both essential for defining national identity and is connected with labor, migration, religion, and citizenship. The sites where national identity is contested vary from the family, the hacienda, and the mind of George. For all of them, however, the family was an apt metaphor that defined national identity. While González posits that religion and piety offered José and Tecla a means of achieving social inclusion, Venegas and Paredes both suggest that indigeneity and citizenship were mutually exclusive for those remained in the U.S.

In these early Chicano novels, the formation of families—with all its contingency—functions both as a device for plot development and a symbol for the well-being of the nation. Furthermore, each author uses marriage to represent both what is and is not possible for both the union itself and the nation. Its relation with plot development is not just through its characters' desires for prestige. Rather, marriage is contingent, and it is related closely with competing narratives about national identity. Marriage for indigenous characters is defined by preservation and is contingent on the realities of labor and migration. In contrast, marriage for the Tejano writers connotes the possibility of social harmony with Anglo-Americans in the future and is contingent on evaluation of character and especially the capacity for reciprocity.

For the Tejano characters in *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez*, the union of two families through marriage—whether between two Tejano families or with an Anglo-American family—is is central to the general competition for land, prestige, and authority. In *Caballero*, intermarriage is both a direct consequence of and symbolizes the hacendados' loss of authority during the war. Like the adult George of George Washington Gómez, the characters of that novel are motivated by their desire for prestige. For George, the possibility of losing prestige is connected not with the outcome of the war (or marriage with an indigenous character) but rather being associated with Mexican residents of South Texas. Despite their different circumstances, the Tejano characters of both novels seek marriage as part of their more general pursuit of authority.

Though it certainly also holds great significance for *George Washington Gómez*, in both of González's novels marriage is central for the general competition for land and prestige. This is most evident in the author's description of rituals surrounding marriage. For example, the title *The Dew on the Thorn* refers to one of two possible heteronormative rituals related to courtship. The "dew on the thorn" could signify either the water that rancheros use to wash their beards in the morning and make themselves presentable in the morning or to a ritual practiced by women before the feast of St. John. While those rituals assumed the exclusion of indigenous characters, in *Caballero*, the possibility of marriage in *Caballero* is tied more closely with the state of relations with Anglo-American settlers. The U.S.-Mexico War disrupts older courtship practices by introducing new competitors that also seek to use marriage to gain land, authority, and prestige. This underlying conflict is what drives the plot of González's second novel.

In both *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez*, a key juncture in the plot emerges when a Spanish-Tejano protagonist decides to marry an Anglo-American person. For Susanita and other Spanish-Tejanas on the hacienda, the question of whether Anglo-Americans can be trusted can be answered, at least in part, by assessing their viability as husbands. They judge Warrener to be trustworthy, because he respects the piety of Tejanas, learns Spanish, and converts to Catholicism. In contrast, other Anglo-American male characters, such as the surveyor, McLane, are judged more negatively. His marriage to Susanita's sister, Angela, is suspect, because he refuses to convert to Catholicism (213). The issue is not about religion so such as character and intentions. Assuming González did indeed approve of Warrener's character, the crucial question is whether he or McHale is most representative of Anglo-American settlers in Texas.

Though Paredes' novel takes place almost a century after *Caballero*, intermarriage also has implications for future relations between Mexico-Tejanos and Anglo-Americans in *George Washington Gómez*. However, Paredes is also concerned with how the motivations of George change between adolescence and adulthood. While George's initial attraction to Ellen while they were college students was because she was studying migrant labor in Central Texas and her family was originally from South Texas, George's comments in the epilogue express a different set of motivations. George's motivations are rooted in his desires. George does not wish for Ellen (nor presumably their son) to learn Spanish. Upon returning to South Texas as an adult, George's "official story" is that the after law school he began working for an urban developer, and they will soon move away from South Texas. He no longer wants to "be a leader of the people" of the Rio Grande Valley.

As with the character Warrener of *Caballero*, the meaning of intermarriage is connected with character motivations and also functions as a measure for the future of Tejano-U.S. relations. Yet with *George Washington Gómez*, the character in question is not the Anglo-American partner but rather the protagonist George. More significant than Ellen's ethnicity is how George remains motivated by his lingering resentment towards his "first love," María Elena. His ill feelings of towards the memory María Elena is not just an obsession with love lost. Rather, it also represents his inner conflict over national identity. As an adult, George desires Ellen at least in part because she is not María Elena. His contradictory desires become apparent during their wedding night (284). While it may not have been his original intent, their marriage becomes one of George's methods for renouncing his Mexican heritage for the sake of "pursuing privilege and prestige.

Like the metaphor of family, marriage describes the boundaries of national identity and the future of the polity in each of these novels. For indigenous characters, the preservation of marriage—like family re-unification—represent the possibility of maintaining at least some degree of autonomy. For Tejano characters, it is also a metaphor for the changing state of relations with Anglo-American settlers and the possibility of peace between two states that share a large land border. While Tejano families can determine whether a potential partner is acceptable based their evaluation of the character of the partnership, it remains uncertain whether peace will continue for future generations. Moreover, González's concern with the history of the U.S.-Mexico War and Paredes' psychology of his protagonist also point to the precariousness of such an accord. For both of the Tejano authors, the traumas of past conflicts linger in the present.

Though they are born and live in different circumstances, both the indigenous and Spanish-Tejano protagonists of each novel live in an arid, desert land that is also the border between two nation-states. As a result, all of them are, to some extent, caught in a state of liminality. However, the ways that their state of liminality manifest differ according to time, place, and their proximity to indigeneity. While both the hacendados and rancheros of *Caballero* and George of *George Washington Gómez* have privileges that arguably offer an opportunity to escape by distancing themselves from Mexicans, it is Don Chipote who risks being labeled as criminal due to his nationality, legal status, and the neighborhoods in which he resides. Even the newfound autonomy of José and Tecla at the end of *Caballero* is relatively circumscribed by the need to find employment from either Anglo-American or Tejano landowners.

In *Las Aventuras*, the liminal state of the chicanos is more acute, and it is the result of their inhumane treatment as often indigenous people who are "superexploited." That is, they work within U.S. markets while being excluded from access to quality employment, housing, medical care, and (if they have re-united with their families) schools. It becomes evident soon after his crossing that Don's Chipote's situation is worse than more privileged chicanos when police officers arrest him with the mistaken assumption that he is inebriated. Upon reaching Los Angeles, Don Chipote lives in a hotel that is also a brothel. For Venegas, the canine character named Sufrelambre, the unemployed, and *cholos/pachucos* each represent to some degree the state of liminality for Mexican emigrants living in the U.S. Don Chipote, like many chicano migrants in the U.S., could not escape the world of *cholos* and *la clase de desgraciados*.

Though the cholos, the unemployed, and Sufrelambre all live in a segregated neighborhoods, it is the cholos who bear the mark of criminality most distinctly. Though they are essential for his story, Venegas both understands and misunderstands the cholos. He understood them in that, like any other group of immigrants, Mexican emigrants moved to the U.S. in search of a better life for their families. For him, it is the cholos, or what many in East Los Angeles then called "*pachucos*," who are most indicative of the foreboding future of Mexican emigrants who make this decision. The author believed the pachucos spoke "neither English nor Spanish,' which suggested to him that they could not belong to either nation. While he saw their state as a warning, Venegas would have found their group identity to be uncanny. That is, their speech and their mannerisms were both familiar and unfamiliar to him. They were not Mexican, yet they reminded him of "home."

If Venegas' novel elicits a certain fascination with the pachucos, the epilogue of *George Washington Gómez* offers a much sterner warning. George's uses the pejorative term "Mexican greasers," which is an expression that holds several possible meanings. One is that it expresses acceptance, if not allegiance, to the notion that Mexicans, and particularly Mexican youth, are criminals. For him, they have no potential. Yet his utterance is also an act of sublimation. That is, by casting the Mexican youth as criminals, he can express his racist sentiments terms that are more acceptable in civil society. Lastly, George's uses the slur in hopes of escaping, or even transcending, his liminal state. His use of the pejorative is both a conscious (if habitual) attempt to separate himself from Mexican youth and an unconscious expression of his private insecurities. He fears he will always be perceived as Mexican.

Whether or not he actually *can* escape his liminal state, each possible meaning of his utterance is evidence of the rhetorical power that the label of criminality holds. It carries the weight of legal authority, sets the terms of inclusion, and makes social and political divisions apparent. While the label of criminality enables George to validate his racist sentiments, this is not intended to suggest that *all* concerns about crime are invalid. Had he at least referred to specific instances of such criminal acts, then he could perhaps have asked more challenging questions about the continued issue of crime in chicano neighborhoods. But by referring to them as "Mexican greasers," George conflated criminal acts with national origins. Instead of citing specific evidence or examples, he labeled all Mexicans as criminals.

Of course, it is not only among Chicanos that crime and punishment delineates the limits of social inclusion and exclusion. It may very well be that it is a fundamental characteristic of criminal law in general. Nevertheless, the pachucas and pachucos did not only have to navigate between respectability and criminality. They also lived between two nations that share a land border. The pachucos, then, were uncanny because they had to traverse boundaries both within the social hierarchy and conflicting national narratives from either side of the border. Even if they rarely, if ever, returned to Mexico, they had to learn how to "code-switch" between two languages. It was they who mediated between Mexican emigrants and civil society north of the border. They adapted by traversing between those two worlds. Because they could not leave, they they adjust to their state of liminality through practical adjustments.

If the protagonists of these novels lived to some degree in a state of liminality to some degree, to what extent do they have volition to escape it? Despite their different circumstances (which was not just due to their proximity to indigeneity but also the time and place in which they lived), both indigenous and Tejano characters must choose between the strategies of resistance and accommodation. While Don Chipote's resistance comes in the form of seeking unity with both his family and his fellow Chicanos, José and Tecla exercise their newfound volition by leaving the hacienda and seeking better wages by working for Anglo-American employers. In contrast, the actions of Ramón, Álvaro, and Don Gabriel represent the ways in which Spanish-Tejanos could either resist or accommodate from 1836-1848. George, of course, decides to accommodate the pressures and incentives to assimilate by separating himself from the pachucos.

A trope throughout *Las Aventuras* is Venegas' description of the various characteristics of "la chicanada" that the Chipotesca familia express during their journey from Texas to southern California. The expression of la chicanada is what defines the will of the Chipotesca familia. Its essence is the migrants' ability to keep a good sense of humor, despite feeling the pangs of hunger, exhaustion, and homesickness. In anticipation of their arrival, Chicanos' often burst spontaneously into guitar-playing, singing, and dancing during their journey to Los Angeles in a Southern Pacific railroad car. These outbursts out not mere 'coping mechanisms but rather they both expressions of unity and acts of resistance to the pervasive sense of uncertainty. Their ability to keep their sense of humor and to have fun demonstrates their continued resilience and their refusal to become despondent. They are oppressed, and yet they can still exert their will in such a way that they will not only be defined as such.

While only Venegas makes the protagonist of his story an indigenous person, the future of indigeneity is what creates the stakes for all three writers. Like Don Chipote, indigenous characters of *Caballero* do have a degree of volition. Unlike Venegas and Paredes (not to mention the hacendados of *Caballero*), José and Tecla exercise their volition by taking advantage of crisis of authority that results from the U.S.-Mexico War. The presence of a new group of settlers offers them a recourse to seek better wages from someone other than the hacendados, which enables José to become a free laborer. Here, it should be noted that the war also led to the formal establishment of slavery in Texas. Their decision to leave Santiago's hacienda is the starkest measure of the hacendados' crisis of masculinity.

Volition for Don Chipote and José and Tecla is defined by their ability to maintain family bonds and find a better life. In contrast, the characters of Ramón, Álvaro, and Don Gabriel offer a range of possible responses to the war for Spanish-Tejano male characters in González's novel. However, any attempt to interpret the intents and meanings behind their actions must ascertain the significance of the fact that González co-authored the story with Eva Raleigh.

The Chicano literary scholar José Limón has argued it is likely that González created the characters and that Eva Raleigh wrote most of the plot. If Limón is correct, then we can ascertain González's true intent for the novel more by analyzing the particular attributes of Ramón, Álvaro, and Gabriel as *characters* than how their actions relate to the novel's plot development. Between them, one can decipher the degree of volition that the hacendados had after their military defeat.

While each of these characters has known peace, all of their actions in the novel take place during a time of war. In a flashback to 1836, Santiago's brother, Ramón, returns from battle with Anglo-American rebels and reports that Santa Anna's forces had been defeated. After his father, Francisco, castigates him for fleeing and acknowledging his cowardice during the fight, Ramón returns to the frontlines and dies fighting the rebels. As U.S. forces cross the border and invade central Mexico ten years later, Santiago's son, Álvaro, decides to join the *guerrilleros*, only to be captured by Warrener. In exchange for his release, Warrener demands permission to marry Santiago's daughter, Susanita. While Ramón and Álvaro choose resistance (albeit at very different moments during the conflict between Mexico and the U.S.), Gabriel chooses accommodation. Gabriel argues initially for selling lands to Anglo-Americans and begins to supplicate favor from McHale.

The roots of the hacendados' crisis of masculinity lie in the fact that the U.S.-Mexico War ends the possibility of overt resistance. In part because the hacendados cannot accept their new situation, leadership must come from elsewhere. Another part of the problem also has to do with demographic changes caused by the war. The deaths of *caballeros* such as Ramón have a negative impact on the social economy amongst Tejanos, which causes the very meaning of honor to change. The familiar notion of honor has been replaced by its opposite, which is the *lack* of honor. This assumes, of course, that it had been previously been possible to attain honor under the hacendados' old regime. Whether or not such honor had actually been attainable, demographic problems would also have been a salient issue during the decades after the Mexican Revolution. In the decades after the revolution, this issue would have been especially salient.

While the new limits on the hacendado's volition becomes apparent throughout *Caballero*, the issue of will is raised rather suddenly during the epilogue of *George Washington Gómez*. Paredes suggests that George's experiences as an adolescent growing up in South Texas—especially in a segregated school system—left an indelible imprint on his psyche. His relationships with both his classmates and his teachers—and especially María Elena—continue to impact his desires and motivations as an adult. As a student, his teachers taught him a particular narrative that both instilled values, attitudes, and norms and discouraged him from challenging their notions of patriotism. Though he questions this narrative as a student, by the epilogue he has embraced it. What explains his transformation? If one were to conclude that George does not have volition, it would be because he cannot escape unconscious insecurities that are rooted in traumas he experienced as an adolescent.

Though the plot of the novel does center on his experiences during adolescence, his adolescence is not what makes George use the pejorative "Mexican greaser" as an adult. The problem with this interpretation is that it mystifies the connections between history and the politics of the present. His utterance is not merely an unconscious expression of his insecurity as a Mexican-American. It is also a nationalist claim for social inclusion that is predicated on the exclusion of Mexican migrants. His associations of Mexicans with crime—along with his surveillance of a radical Latina labor organizer, his employment as an urban developer, and his tacit acceptance of segregation—are all the means by which he hopes to gain political power in the future. They are all essential parts of the narrative he has chosen for himself in his pursuit of authority. While he separates himself ideologically from the "Mexican greasers" of South Texas under his own free will, he does not realize the consequences of his decision until it is too late. He has betrayed both his family and his friends.

Like the protagonists of their novels, the authors each posited a theory that attempted to make sense of the experiences of chicanos living in the post-revolutionary era. Though their novels used different characters, plots, settings, and categories of analysis, Venegas, González, and Paredesused literary methods to analyze national identity and the inner conflict for chicanos living in the Southwest. Despite having distinctive emphases and methods, each novel evinces the themes of indigeneity, marriage, liminality, and volition. Indigenous and Tejano characters are born into circumstances that are fundamentally different, and every character must choose between resistance and accommodation. But another question remains, which is who will represent chicanos in the region?

Each of these writers had a distinct interpretation of what was causing the Border People to live in a state of liminality. Yet the stories they wrote all described people who found themselves—in some cases quite suddenly—living between two nations and facing an uncertain future. Though their presence is most notable in *Las Aventuras*, in these novels it is the *pachucos* and *pachucas* that that most represent the Border People's states of liminality in these novels. They fused languages, mores, and customs from either side of the border, which created a particular group identity that was both familiar and unfamiliar. By necessity, they traversed the boundaries of citizenship while acting as mediators between their parents and civil society in the U.S. The pachucos, more than anyone else, had the potential to be organic intellectuals for Latino communities in the U.S. Southwest.

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