

6-15-1985

The Protest Function of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico

Phillip B. Gonzales

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/shri_publications

Recommended Citation

Gonzales, Phillip B.. "The Protest Function of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico." (1985). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/shri_publications/20

This Working Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SHRI Publications by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.



UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87131

Working Paper #111

Spring 1985

**THE PROTEST FUNCTION
OF
SPANISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY IN NEW MEXICO**

**By
Phillip B. Gonzales
University of California, Berkeley
(Sociology)**



**Southwest
Hispanic
Research
Institute**

Working Paper # 111

Spring 1985

THE PROTEST FUNCTION
OF SPANISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY IN NEW MEXICO

By

Phillip B. Gonzales
University of California, Berkeley (Sociology)

WORKING PAPER SERIES

Jose A. Rivera, Editor

Southwest Hispanic Research Institute
University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131

(505) 277-2965

Published and disseminated by the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute as part of an ongoing project to stimulate research focused on Southwest Hispanic Studies. Copies of this working paper or any other titles in the series may be ordered at cost by writing to the address indicated above.

THE PROTEST FUNCTION
OF SPANISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY IN NEW MEXICO*

The Spanish Heritage is a variation of ethnic identity in the Southwest that has had its greatest expression in the historical experience of New Mexico. In particular, "Spanish," "Spanish-American," and "Hispano" were designations which predominated in public references to the Spanish surnamed people of New Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century. More than any other, this was the period in which the claims to Spanish culture and Spanish blood flourished throughout the state.

Spanish-Americanism can be approached from two essential perspectives. One can start out by agreeing wholeheartedly with the Spanish claim, in which case it becomes problematic only when one wishes to defend it against the claim of historical Mexican culture and race throughout the Southwest. Or, one can begin with the social science precept that all ethnic identification is variable, in which case the meaning of Spanish identity is found to lie in the social and historical circumstances in which it is expressed. This second approach forms an analytical perspective on the Spanish American (and any other) identity pattern in New Mexico.

Thus far, the analytical approach to Spanish-Americanism

has been represented by the critique of what McWilliams called the Spanish Fantasy Heritage.¹ This critique sets itself against the Spanish culture claim by arguing that it represents false consciousness and rationalization.

The critique holds that the Spanish Fantasy Heritage arose within the time period under consideration here. We are given to understand that after World War I, increased Anglo migration from Texas and other Southern areas introduced a widespread anti-Mexican sentiment in New Mexico. Supposedly, the New Mexican reacted to this prejudice in a psychological and cultural manner. By dissociating from the Mexican and highlighting only the Iberian or colonial aspects of his heritage, the New Mexican acted as if to represent a high brow European culture and pure "white" blood.²

Nancie Gonzalez offers the most analytical explanation for the Spanish Fantasy Heritage. She emphasizes that glorification of colonial New Mexico is usually identified with people who are "quite successful by Anglo worldly standards." The function of the Spanish "legend," as she terms it, relates to Anglo dominance. "In the past," Gonzalez writes, "many of the successful have been made to feel the pain of discrimination, and their defense has been to gild and glorify the past which is now lost to them forever. Many of the symbols to which they cling perhaps never existed in colonial New Mexico, but the belief in the past does serve the purpose of alleviating feelings of inferiority and furthering social and ethnic solidarity."³

This paper argues that the conventional critique of the so-called Spanish Fantasy Heritage is an incomplete, and therefore a misleading interpretation of Spanish American identity in New Mexico. It is incomplete in that it never really analyzes the contexts in which the pattern has been expressed in time. It is also incomplete in that it fails to consider the variety of ways that Hispano identity has been formulated. As a result, the critique misses some crucial functions that arose in the past. In particular, I shall take issue with the hypothesis that the pattern reflected only sublimation in the face of prejudice, discrimination and Anglo hegemony by showing that it could, in fact, also help to facilitate organized challenges to these very social problems.

In a recent work, John Chavez reviews some Spanish-American writing from the 1930s, and he notes that elaboration of the Spanish "myth" as he calls it, was sometimes fused with a rhetorical concern for the inequalities that Spanish-speaking people were made to suffer under the Americanization process.⁴ This brings into focus what has not received due recognition. Away from the notion that Spanish belief in the past had to signify a turning away from racism, Chavez points out that nothing in the belief itself necessarily prevented adherents from being able to own up to this reality.

Between World War I and World War II, Spanish-Americans widely believed that the University of New Mexico (UNM) har-

bored prejudice and practiced exclusionary policies against them. In 1933, these same Spanish-Americans from throughout the state took it upon themselves to do something on the belief. They organized two protests against the university in the span of three months. One was carried out in the state legislature and the other occurred in an ad hoc manner.

This paper concentrates on the first of these episodes wherein the Spanish-Americans attempted to legally abolish the fraternities and sororities at UNM. Special attention will be paid to the sense of identity which was associated with, and indeed, which, I argue, was essential to the protest's occurrence. Going a step beyond Chavez, then, we shall see that Spanish identity was capable of moving out from rhetoric into the world of social contention in the service of Hispanic interests.

Two points about Spanish Americanism will stand out in the account. The first one concerns the special identity element that came to the fore at the time but which extant statements on Spanish identity have failed to emphasize.

If we look behind the content of the Spanish-culture and pure-blood claims, what appear is a bedrock identification, not with Spain or things Spanish necessarily, but with New Mexico fundamentally. Realizing this, the Spanish Heritage takes on a rational light, given New Mexico's relatively long history of social isolation. The attachment to New Mexico was so compelling that the Spanish-American designation was considered equivalent to the concept of the New Mexico

native. The stress on the native and the native's heritage was a response to the Anglo's presence in New Mexico, more so, perhaps, than to the Mexican national's minor presence there in comparison to other areas of the Southwest.

In the 1960s and 70s, the Chicano Movement gave the Southwest's prior ownership by Mexico a certain political and moral significance. The Movement developed its own variation of the temporal principle which awards a right to security and equality if not privilege to the native in his or her homeland. What we shall see is Spanish Americans adopting the same principle in relation to New Mexico in 1933 and using it for purposes of social protest, much as the Chicano Movement would start to do some thirty-five to forty years later. We shall take note of the power that was infused within the Spanish Heritage by this nativism, especially as the nativism was combined with some of the more glorifying tendencies in the New Mexican's belief in the past.

The second major point concerns the precise question of who was actually expressing identity and acting collectively in 1933. It is not enough to say, as Gonzalez does, that the Spanish legend is identified with "the successful" members of the minority. In this work, Spanish-American pride will emanate from a public sphere, but more importantly, it will arise among the politically prominent Spanish Americans.

This will demonstrate that historically, the exceptional usage of Spanish identity in New Mexico inter-meshed at

times with another special New Mexico feature: the Hispano's significant political role. As New Mexico nativism was invoked by private Spanish-Americans together with Spanish-American politicians, Spanish identity became less a psychological salve and more like an agent to help confront Anglo dominance at particular moments.

The Issue

The Proud People is Kyle Crichton's 1944 novel that attempts to reflect something of the Spanish American condition in New Mexico. The Proud People centers on a particular extended family. In the fashion observed by Crichton during his New Mexico years, the book's Lejanza-Esquivel family grandly traces its lineage all the way back to Oñate's settlement of New Mexico. Clearly, one of the main questions of the work is, How are young Spanish-Americans going to cope when so much Anglo prejudice surrounds them in the region? The story depicts the University of New Mexico, located in Albuquerque, as a prime source of anti-Hispano prejudice. And in one memorable scene, the whole family is devastated when one of its members is deliberately refused membership in a sorority, by former Anglo friends no less, because of her ethnic background.⁵

Crichton sets his story in 1941, at the beginning of the decade in which several writers took note of the university in relation to Spanish-Americans. In 1944 also, sociologist Carolyn Zeleny reported on informants who emphasized to her

the "marked system of social separatism" existing on the campus and the "strict rules" among fraternities and sororities "never to admit Spanish-Americans." Zeleny concluded that the discrimination suffered at the university was probably the reason why such large numbers of Spanish-Americans went elsewhere, even out of state, for their higher education.⁶

After Crichton and Zeleny, the university in general and the fraternities and sororities in particular were regularly featured in accounts of New Mexico's Spanish-American situation. Carey McWilliams picked up on the report of fraternity exclusion in 1948; E.B. Fincher in 1950; and Erna Fergusson in 1951.⁷ In 1969, Nancie Gonzalez reviewed Zeleny and was made to regard the fraternity question so important as a gauge of status that she interviewed fraternity students for their ethnic attitudes. She further constructed a table showing the trend of growing Spanish-American membership in Greek letter organizations throughout the 1960s.⁸

This university concern became a part of New Mexico letters no doubt because of Spanish-Americans themselves who tended to remark on it. With difficulty otherwise could we imagine that white fraternities, common as they always were, would have attracted the attention of professional observers that they did.

Because the authors above do not connect the fraternities and sororities to the confrontations of 1933, the impression they convey is of Spanish-Americans simply complaining, perhaps to assuage pain from the kind of discrimination Gonzalez had in mind in explaining away the Spanish legend.⁹ But more than

the word of separatism alone, it was the reform agitations of 1933 which solidified the Spanish-American's attitude toward the university as writers would notice it later.

While the segregation question at the university was not noted in print until the 1940s, the issue arose among Spanish-Americans themselves as far back as the early 1920s. In order, therefore, to frame the problem at hand, it is necessary to set the context of the university's original relationship to the Spanish-American people.

Up through the first two decades of the twentieth century, it was indeed common for the Spanish speaking to send their sons and an occasional daughter to college outside of New Mexico. A deeper reason than discrimination at this time, however, was the simple fact of institutional inadequacy. The State University, as it was first called, was established late (1892), and so it remained small, lacking enough resources for even a regional accreditation.

In the twenties, the Anglo portion grew rapidly in New Mexico's population. A solid middle class emerged and this led the university to develop noticeably. While the university grew at this time, the trickle of Spanish-surnamed students turned into a steady stream. Not only was the institution showing some worth to many who would have gone elsewhere before, but increasing numbers of Spanish-Americans flowed into the state university out of a maturing public school system. The proportion of Spanish enrollment stayed well below parity

in relation to the Spanish-surnamed majority in the state. But by best estimates, it rose from about three percent in the early twenties to between ten and eleven percent in 1933 when total university enrollment was 1200.¹⁰

Of course, all other student elements grew during these years also, and the fraternity-sorority groups more profitably than any others. While these organizations had always been a strong feature on the campus, they took on a vigorous prominence increasingly up through the thirties. They received several national charters in quick succession, for example. With literal industriousness, the state's businessmen undertook the building of fraternity and sorority houses for their offspring between 1928 and 1935, as well as the arranging of land adjacent to the university for this purpose.¹¹

With these organizational and material boosts, the Greeks came to dominate all phases of student activity like never before. The fraternities and sororities developed their tradition of yearly competition among themselves, and this virtually guaranteed their control of organized student life. This was the crux of what Spanish-Americans encountered coming onto the campus. The situation was exacerbated by an overbearing cliquishness. Befitting their classic middle class institution in America, the Greek houses at UNM were overwhelmingly lily.

From the onset of statehood, Antonio A. Sedillo was one of the more accomplished, although unsung, figures in New Mexico affairs. Sedillo was a delegate to the Constitutional Conven-

tion of 1910 where he helped draft important provisions for Spanish American rights into New Mexico's political framework. Throughout his career, Sedillo served the common worker by organizing and leading the Alianza Hispano-Americana, the largest mutual aid society in the Southwest. He eventually became an effective district attorney, counsel for at least one case before the U.S. Supreme Court, speaker of the New Mexico house of representatives, and a personal aide to Governor Octaviano Larrazolo. Between 1919 and 1927, Sedillo also served on the board of regents for the University of New Mexico under three different governorships.¹²

Before going to law school at Georgetown, Juan A. Sedillo, son of Antonio, spent what in those days could serve as two qualifying years at the University of New Mexico, finishing there in 1923. It became a family legend that as the younger Sedillo was starting at the university, an Anglo who had been close to him from childhood, suddenly spurned their friendship upon his initiation into a fraternity.¹³

Under ordinary circumstances, this would have been a small, private incident, perhaps easily forgotten in time. But in this instance, it occurred against the house of a true New Mexico prominente. It happened, moreover, while this prominent figure, who was more than aware of the rights to education that New Mexico officially guaranteed to Spanish-American citizens, was fulfilling a caretaker's task for the university as requested.

It is also significant that it offended a particularly

headstrong individual. Minor as it was, the incident would surely contribute to motivation after ten years when the younger Sedillo, a state senator by that time, would seek to do away with the fraternities and sororities altogether.

In the meantime, Mela Sedillo, younger sister of Juan, was told by their father that if it mattered all that much, anyone who wanted could form their own club on campus. Mela was unable to know of such interest among other Spanish-speaking students; but with her father's words as encouragement, she did bring some Anglo friends together, and this group chartered the Chi Omega sorority in 1925.¹⁴

Mela Sedillo's part in forming the sorority was immediately interpreted by Spanish-Americans in general. To **them**, her assertiveness made a statement in the context of Anglo dominance. The memory that "Mela Sedillo started a sorority at the university," was one to stay with Spanish-Americans for generations to come.¹⁵

But if Sedillo could do it, why not others? Occasionally, the fraternities and sororities did admit more assimilated Spanish-Americans. But in view of the trend, it is significant that Sedillo herself did not remain a sorority sister for long; not after having to witness up close the Greek mentality that labelled other students "barbarians" in a really hateful manner.¹⁶ To Spanish-Americans, the fraternities and sororities represented a foreign milieu. A cultural barrier prevented many Spanish-Americans, even middle class ones, from making individual efforts to join. Mela Sedillo came away with the

conviction that such organizations were inappropriate at educational centers.¹⁷

The Action

The active responses of minority groups to their social subordination never occur in vacuums. Often, the impulse to address one's problems is blocked off until changes in the dominant society can open up some opportunity.

As Spanish-speaking students stayed marginal in the UNM student body going into the thirties, and while the faculty could only hire part-time Spanish-surnamed instructors intermittently, the sour reputation of the university could only work its way informally within Spanish-American circles. Beginning in 1931, however, New Mexico's newly elected governor created the political ground on which Spanish-American nativism could openly confront the university situation.

Governor Arthur Seligman was elected in 1930 on the Depression-necessitated promise of bringing the state's spending within its ever shrinking means. According to one observer, Seligman's budget cutting approach was "fanatical in its zeal."¹⁸ From the start of his first administration, when the university submitted an increased budget request, Governor Seligman believed that the state's institutions of higher learning were selfishly uncooperative in the cause of addressing the economic crisis.

Seligman's irritation with the university got to the point where he was calling it a "sacred cow" that should be

no longer worshipped.¹⁹ Immediately, Seligman demanded a review of all university purchases, down to the smallest ones, and in 1932 he enacted a thirty-five percent reduction in faculty and administrative salaries. Seligman was re-elected in November of 1932, and the University went into the 1933 legislature fearful of more potentially disastrous slashes.²⁰

With Seligman's declaration of open season on the university, Spanish-Americans could start to move on their own traditional grudge against the institution. UNM's President James F. Zimmerman was the first to feel the sting.

During the Fall Semester of 1932, Zimmerman gave a series of speeches in California where he advocated Pan American programs for universities in the Southwest based on exchange of scholars with Latin America. Additionally, Zimmerman announced the things that his own school was doing in the interests of Latin affairs. He stressed that the university was promoting native cultural preservation in the Southwest, providing special training for teachers of Spanish-speaking children in the San Jose Project, and encouraging bi-lingual clubs among the students.²¹

In theory, Zimmerman would have been justified in expecting praise and support for his remarks since the University of New Mexico had always expressed interest in Latin American programs. Instead, he was met with harsh skepticism after his speeches were publicized in New Mexico.

In a letter to an Albuquerque editor, someone from Santa Rosa accused the president of hypocritically using the Spa-

nish American people just to build an image. "Your San Jose project," the critic said, "is a living confession of your past incapacity or unwillingness to cope with a bounden obligation-- the sensible, scientific training of your foster children, the Spanish Americans, in such educational terms as you would jubilantly pose before a Latin American world."²²

Here now, we can start to examine Spanish identity. This statement is laden with a sense of the Spanish-American's native predicament. The Spanish-Americans are foster children in this view because it was the American who came to them in New Mexico originally. It was the Anglo who took control of the homeland, forcing himself to "adopt" the native. This is why Anglo patrimony is "bounden obligated", more so than if the Spanish-American had insisted on moving to the United States uninvited.

Note how the Spanish-American perspective accuses the Anglo society of discrimination. The writer obviously means that the university has failed to educate Spanish Americans according to their significant presence in the state. The president's liberal words are not trusted because Spanish-Americans have long been poorly represented and served by the institution for which he is totally responsible.

A week later, a Spanish-American from Gallup concurred with the disgruntled Santa Rosano. Claiming at first to "know the soul of the Latin majority," and emphasizing that he spoke for young Spanish Americans who had discussed their station in the life of the Southwest, this opinionator added the view that

"the doors of the social life of the university, to the average Spanish American student, are not very inviting."

Testing his own allegation, he said, "It's true, to obtain a diploma one does not have to belong to a fraternity or be a social standout." And then he reflected the sentiment that Crichton would address from a literary point of view twelve years later: "It's the feeling of being slighted that hurts." The Gallup resident then connected this kind of insult to the more general problem of employment discrimination against Spanish-Americans in the Southwest. And he ended this part of his statement by defining the native's Spanish heritage in terms of victimization: "Thus is our plight /in/ the country which our forefathers, the Conquistadores, fought for, explored and settled."

While the hurt of being slighted must have been real enough, there was nevertheless the sense in which this person was dealing in a kind of utilitarian ethnic pride. On one hand, he pointed to the injury being done to the "soul" of the Latin native, but on the other hand, he was willing to de-emphasize the integrity of this soul in the interest of social integration. Thus, with a flourish he finished by stressing "the duty of our Anglo-Saxon brother to extend his hand in help and not /withhold/ it / w/orking side by side for the mutual welfare of our state...we will be without distinction, not as Anglo or a Latin, but an American citizen."²⁸

This sounds much like a plea to allow assimilation, which

it might be. But it also reflects the yearning of the Spanish Heritage to have it both ways: to be able to invoke the native's soul and also to share "side by side" in the Anglo's institutional riches. Indeed, the assumption was that it was precisely by virtue of the former's historical priority in New Mexico that the Spanish-American was entitled to the latter.

The beauty of the formulation was reflected in the wide extent to which it was successfully used by many Spanish-Americans of mixed parentage and many who inter-married with Anglos.

A month after this second message appeared, Spanish-Americans jumped at the chance to threaten what they considered their primary obstacle to a university integration. The movement in this direction started among students themselves at the university.

The Great Depression was not as ruinous in New Mexico as elsewhere. One sign of this was the continued growth and diversification of the student body at UNM on through the thirties. A by-product of student growth was the expansion of activities for undergraduates and the increasing importance of the activities in terms of status and work experience.

In this whole development, independent students set out to challenge the rule of the fraternities and sororities, not unlike the trend on other campuses throughout the nation. In 1932 and 1933, the Independent Students organization at UNM

made its first major dent in the Greek hegemony. In a frenetic campaign, an Independent won student body president for '32-'33. For two semesters running, the Independents won the "scholastic cup" for the highest grade point average among organized student groups.²⁴

In the conscious bid to unseat the fraternities and sororities, substantial help was given by Spanish-American students, especially in the athletic competition. An important ally here was the Bi-lingual Club which was overwhelmingly Spanish American. The Independents and Bi-linguals combined to do well in track and field. But the Bi-linguals also laureled on their own, coming in second in baseball, for example, and even more impressively, winning the highly coveted basketball championship.²⁵

The Bi-lingual Club was not solely athletic, however. In fact, its original function was civic. For most of its members, the club provided a forum for discussing the social welfare of the Spanish-speaking people. In 1933 the group took an interest in the alarming rate of Spanish attrition in New Mexico's public schools, and scheduled a series of talks by a representative of the state department of education in order to discuss resolutions.²⁶

With their social concern aroused, it was rather natural that these students should carry the fraternity embattlement on to a more serious level. It had to be done, according to them, since the Greeks controlled too much on campus, including, as it was perceived, the professor's favors, while acting

like social lions with them. One Spanish student saw the matter quite proudly. "We made them aware that we were not going to sit there and let them do that to us. We were the scions of distinguished families in New Mexico and there was no way they were going to push us around like that."²⁷

The "distinguished" Hispano family is vintage New Mexico heritage. Its symbolization here carries a definite reminder on top of the native's basic right to security. After the Spanish settlement, New Mexico was governed and economically controlled by the "distinguished" rico class. To Spanish-Americans in the 1930s, the honor, and indeed, the practice of these traditional responsibilities still lived. Under this assumption, the young Spanish "scion" required the Anglo to accommodate his right to share in the power centers of his own land.

To vindicate their tradition-bound honor, the students turned to New Mexico's eleventh legislature and found there a sympathetic ear in Santa Fe Senator Juan A. Sedillo.

Sedillo, it should be noted, was elected to the senate in the historic national election of 1932, as one of U.S. Senator Bronson Cutting's Progressive Republicans. Spanish Americans played central roles in Cutting's organization, in both the leadership and the rank and file. Indeed, a major, if mostly unwritten plank for Progressives advocated the rights of the Spanish-speaking people. With Cutting's support, the top Spanish surnamed Progressives in New Mexico-- who comprised a long list including Miguel A. Otero,

Mauricio Miera, E.A. Perrault, Antonio Sedillo, Orlando Uli-varri, Juan Salazar, and others-- all spoke out in defense of the native's cultural and political heritage.²⁸

As if the Progressive's stand for Spanish rights on top of a youthful fraternity snub was not sufficient motivation for Sedillo's anti-fraternity legislation, it turns out that Progressives had a special alliance with Governor Seligman. Seligman won handily in 1930 because Cutting's support was thrown his way in the senator's battle with oligarchical Republican stalwarts. In 1932, Cutting helped to lead a national Progressive movement for F.D.R. As a result, Seligman benefitted from a great fusion throughout New Mexico between Progressive Republicans and Democrats.²⁹ This is the fusion which swept Sedillo into office.

On January 26, 1933, Sedillo introduced Senate Bill 71, "...To Prevent the Formation and Prohibit the Existence of Secret Fraternities and Sororities in State Educational Institutions, Universities, Colleges and Schools..." Besides making it unlawful for students to join fraternities and sororities or helping in their formation, the act proposed a power of enforcement to boards of regents and trustees, and the punishment of suspension or termination for students involved in such organizations.³⁰

In announcing the bill, Senator Sedillo cited a California precedent and pointed to some ivy league schools that he said had abolished fraternities and sororities, arguing that with this example, such a move could only make social rela-

tions that much better in a small university such as UNM. In a move calculated to win Anglo votes, Sedillo downplayed the racial justification for the bill and played up the discrimination allegedly engendered by the fraternities and sororities against the poor in general, "be they Anglo or Latin."³¹

The next day, a committee of Spanish students showed up at the legislature with a petition bearing some seventy-five signatures, some of them Anglo, in support of the anti-fraternity bill. Like Sedillo the day before, the petition emphasized the injury done to non-fraternity Anglos together with the effect the Greek system had on the Spanish. This inter-racial and class concern notwithstanding, the press found it difficult to ignore the emphasis that the protest leaders themselves were giving to the special Hispano dimension, as in the fact that one of them was "said to be a grandson of Donaciano Vigil, first territorial governor of New Mexico in 1847."³²

It should be safe to assume that within New Mexico's parliamentary chamber, this reference to Governor Vigil was not arbitrary. Under the circumstances, the governor's image combined the native's venerable leadership tradition with demonstration of Hispano ability under Anglo rules.

Meanwhile, the Inter-fraternity Council was spurred to defend itself, forming its own lobby on the same day the Spanish students went to the legislature. The Council made an effective argument in pointing out that the fraternity system saved the state thousands of dollars in student housing. Anglo legislators who were also alumni of the university warned that

if the fraternities and sororities were done away with, even more restrictive private clubs would emerge in their place. In the meantime, President Zimmerman was reported "deprecating" all the public discussion on the fraternities and sororities, and he defended the university's record on matters Hispanic.³³

Immediately, the chair of the senate's education committee declared zero chances for passage of Bill 71.³⁴ Her statement may have had the effect of stirring Spanish American combativeness. The protest got broad enough that letters of support for the bill arrived in the senate from some twenty Spanish American students attending universities in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere. Part of this may have been political orchestration, as the list of names included the brother of Senator Sedillo, but there is little doubt that a general chord among Spanish-Americans was struck, as indicated by support of the bill coming from the son of U.S. Congressman Dennis Chavez and representative of the non-Progressive camp within the Democratic Party.³⁵

In the New Mexico public, several statements of protest sought to interpret a long-range meaning for the cause, and inevitably, the native's orientation served as bulwark for historical justifications. As long as race prejudice was the issue at hand, there was one tendency to lay the blame radically in terms of the national violations of the American conquest. Thus, for example, did the Independent Club of Bernalillo County, a Progressive political organization, resolve against "those usurpers who come into our beloved

land of our inheritance with their prejudiced minds pretending to be superior in class to our ancestors."³⁶

On the other hand, it is quite interesting that the charge of prejudice during the anti-fraternity controversy was also hooked up with what is generally considered one of the most conservative aspects of the Spanish Heritage, i.e., the myth that all indigenous New Mexicans accepted the American conquest happily. It was said, for example, that "If anyone has the right of way concerning the State University of New Mexico, it is certainly the children, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of the families of New Mexico who extended a welcoming hand and gave hostage to the invasion of our own country, New Mexico."³⁷

These two statements reveal how flexibly the Spanish Heritage could link the present with the past. In effect, the first says to the Anglo, "We know that your nation stole the land from our forebears and that you are continuing to deprive us even more." The second says, "We welcomed you with open arms. Why should you do this to us now?"

In the legislature, Senate Bill 71 took its course. At mid-February, it went before the education committee where four sets of parties presented testimony. Senator Sedillo and the Spanish students continued with the charge that the fraternities and sororities lent themselves to an "undemocratic system of caste." There were also Anglo supporters of the bill who took their stand primarily on the ground of

etiquette and the boorish manners of the fraternities and sororities.

On the other side, the fraternity students had already turned in their own petition with four hundred names on it. To the committee they said that "any barriers, racial or otherwise, the creation of which had been credited to fraternities and sororities, existed only in the minds of those students who were not members of such organizations."

Finally, David Chavez, a Spanish-American district attorney, former mayor of Santa Fe, and brother of Congressman Dennis Chavez, argued against passage of the bill. However, he acknowledged the problem of segregation at the university and he said it was time the fraternities and sororities began admitting Spanish students.³⁸

A week later, Spanish-Americans in the house of representatives drafted a resolution suggesting the university administration do something about social conditions on the campus. No mention of fraternities and sororities was made in the resolution, but it did say that its intent was to insure a positive response to the Spanish student protest to the legislature.³⁹

Facing an Anglo-controlled legislature, backers of the anti-fraternity bill were realistic about its chances. One student protestor admitted the ineffectiveness of "legislative force" in the resolution of social problems, and said that the "ulterior motive" of the bill was to "bubble the warped conditions of the state institution and bring them to

the attention of the taxpayers..."⁴⁰

The bill came up for committee review on March 6. One newspaper gave an appropriately ironic obituary. "This much discussed bill," it reported, "died an inconspicuous death after all the fireworks, letters, petitions and hearings it has been accorded. An unfavorable report of the Senate education committee was adopted Monday and without a word of debate, or even a roll call."⁴¹

So that the protest would not end on an entirely frustrated note, Spanish-American legislators in the house had the last say. Six of them got a resolution passed which urged the university president and the board of regents to do everything in their power to "lessen and eventually do away with the proven class discrimination that surely exists on the part of the membership of fraternities and sororities in a center of learning and culture, where only the most broadminded spirit of tolerance should prevail..."⁴²

Conclusion

Previous analytical assessments concentrate only on the more glorifying aspects of the Spanish Heritage and have not examined the real historical contexts in which its expression has been made in New Mexico. At this stage in the field of ethnic studies in New Mexico, many of the important socio-political contexts themselves have yet to be uncovered.

This paper brings light upon the anti-fraternity protest of 1933, an event unnoticed thus far in New Mexico's historical

literature. One of the important suggestions coming out of its examination is that in New Mexico, a spirit of ethno-criticism against the Anglo-dominated society prevailed among the Spanish-speaking people in the 1930s, much as the spirit of the Chicano Movement prevailed in the Southwest after the 1960s. Indeed, the anti-fraternity outburst even provided the Spanish Americans with their own forceful hero in Senator Sedillo, who was lauded, as it was proclaimed, "for having the courage of coming to the front in behalf of his race."⁴³

For racial protest to arise, it is necessary that its participants have a developed sense of its minority legacy. It is clear that it was precisely the Spanish Heritage, based at this juncture on the rights of the New Mexico native, which provided the necessary reference perspective for protest in 1933. This directly contradicts Gonzalez' influential theory, that Spanish belief in the past was only a means for forgetting Anglo discrimination. The fact of the anti-fraternity bill's failure does not mitigate the importance of this interpretive finding.

A month and a half after the fraternity agitation ended in the state legislature, Spanish-Americans struck against the University of New Mexico once again. This time the response was spontaneous and several times greater than the earlier legislative action. A research project by a university professor angered the Spanish American community greatly. As a result, mass community meetings, ad hoc committees and personal reactions from all over the state were marshalled in

a great burst of energy directed at correcting social relations on the campus.⁴⁴

This second event was quite complex and it sprung out of a tension which cannot be adequately described in this limited space. Suffice to say that it was also greatly dependent on the expression of Spanish identity. One protestor, a student at the university, did reflect the aspect of Mexican dissociation in the Spanish Heritage when he publically said that he had "not witnessed one act of equity at the university between the /races/" and said his fellow classmates referred to him as a 'Greaser and Mexican.'"⁴⁵

Another spokesperson was considerate enough to include the ultimate New Mexico native in pointing out that the "Indians and conquistadores were the first Americans" in the state. Depicting the position of the noble conquistador's descendants, the speaker followed up with, "The Anglos have been coming in among us year after year until they have got us down now. This is the time to act and with the aid of those of us who are educated we should be able to protect ourselves."⁴⁶

Both of the protests in 1933 were carried out in essential part by politically powerful Spanish Americans. Future studies will probably show that the political factor was crucial in the actual development and spread of the Spanish Heritage in New Mexico. Textbook descriptions like to point out the exceptional role of the Spanish-surnamed in New Mexico politics. But they indicate nothing about a possible relationship between this

political role and the widespread usage of Spanish Heritage for the twentieth century. This paper suggests that there was an intimate relation between the two. The suggestion makes sense. The Spanish legend was a broadly institutionalized form in New Mexico's cultural system while the Spanish-American's greatest role in the society was political. In the relatively closed New Mexico world in earlier times, it follows that there should be a close connection. Further research in this area will probably reveal other instances of Spanish-Americanism participating in the attempt to deal with Anglo dominance, perhaps more centrally within the electoral process itself.

The Spanish Heritage in New Mexico was actually a complex identity syndrome. While it may have provided a protective shell for some who could not face the strains of Anglo discrimination, for others it provided the very perspective with which to confront their subordinated position.⁴⁷

Spanish-American pride was not based solely on the glory of the colonial past and a fetish for European blood. There was also the realization within it-- sometimes open, often latent-- that Spanish-Americans were conquered in their own land. It follows then, that a new, or at least an expanded, interpretation of Spanish-Americanism is required. At a time when racial repression was high in the United States, the Spanish-surnamed of New Mexico found a way of going around the blockage presented to them by the stigmatized Mexican. What has not been appreciated is that their pathway could make

quite political turns. Beyond therapeutic and expressive functions, the Spanish Heritage served to instrumentalize indignation over the fact of racial dominance, sometimes at a moment's notice, so that Spanish-Americans might act in their social interest.

Notes

- * Portions of this paper are taken from the author's Ph.D. dissertation, "'A Perfect Furor of Indignation': Political Scapegoating by Minority Groups," University of California, Berkeley, 1985. For help in the preparation of this work, special thanks go to Tobias Duran; also to Jose Rivera and Ray Burrola of the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute.
1. Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States (New York:Monthly Review Press, Second Edition, 1961), Chapter II.
 2. Arthur Leon Campa, Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico (Albuquerque:University of New Mexico Press, 1946), pp. 12-16; Mary Austin, "Mexicans and New Mexico," Survey 66 (1931):144; Nancie L. Gonzalez, The Spanish-Americans of New Mexico: A Heritage of Pride (Albuquerque:University of New Mexico Press, 1969), pp. 80-81, 202-205; Joseph V. Metzgar, "Ethnic Sensitivity of Spanish New Mexicans: A Survey and Analysis," New Mexico Historical Review 49 (1974):53-54.
 3. Gonzalez, The Spanish Americans of New Mexico, p.81.
 4. John R. Chavez,The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest (Albuquerque:University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 97.
 5. Kyle Crichton, The Proud People (New York:Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), pp. 226-232.
 6. Carolyn Zeleny, "Relations Between the Spanish-Americans and Anglo-Americans in New Mexico: A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in a Dual-Ethnic Relationship," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1944), p. 306.
 7. McWilliams, North From Mexico, p.79; E.B. Fincher, "Spanish Americans as a Political Factor in New Mexico, 1912-1950," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1950), p. 54; Erna Fergusson, Pageant of Three Peoples (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973 edition), p. 229.
 8. Gonzalez, The Spanish-Americans of New Mexico, pp. 111-113.
 9. Crichton's fiction makes direct connections between the significance of the sororities and fraternities at UNM and the Spanish Heritage. Kyle Crichton, The Proud People, Chapter XIX. Crichton also alludes to but does not depict the anti-university fights that Spanish Americans took up in 1933. See p. 231 where one of the characters, angry at the fraternities and sororities, says "We can fight them!"

and "...they should be stopped entirely"; and pp.264-266 where a character responds indignantly to the news that an Anglo outsider is proposing to study the Spanish-American people.

10. There are no official figures that give ethnic breakdowns in enrollment for the period. This estimate is based partly on what university officials related in contemporary press releases, e.g., Santa Fe New Mexican, January 16, 1933, and partly on "The University of New Mexico Alumni Association Directory, 1981," (Dallas:Southwest Offset, Inc.), pp. 353-357.
11. This picture is gleaned from several sources covering the period in question, including the U.N.M. Weekly, the New Mexico Lobo, the University of New Mexico Regents Minutes, all in the Special Collections Department of the University of New Mexico; and Frank D. Reeve, "History of the University of New Mexico," (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1928).
12. Albuquerque Tribune, October 24, 1933; Albuquerque Journal, October 25, 1933; El Independiente, October 27, 1933; Jose Amaro Hernandez, Mutual Aid for Survival: The Case of the Mexican American (Malabar, Florida:Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1983), p. 35 and passim.
13. Mela Sedillo Koeber, Oral History Interview, July 8, 1982, transcribed, p. 5 (Hereafter, Sedillo Interview).
14. Sedillo Interview, pp. 1-2; New Mexico Lobo, January 9, 1925.
15. In speaking with Spanish Americans of senior generation, it is clear that this memory still lives today.
16. "In every community, probably, and in any generation there is social emulation: there are certain families, or certain individuals, association with whom will seem to other people to number among the elect. You will find this emulation in its most acute form today in the fraternity systems of some colleges; in adult communities the lines are less inexorably drawn. The smaller and less fluid the community, the clearer this phenomenon is likely to be..." Fredrick Lewis Allen, The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950 (New York:Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 39.
17. Sedillo Interview, pp. 3-4.
18. Paul A.F. Walter, "Necrology: Arthur Seligman," New Mexico Historical Review 13 (1933):312.

19. Santa Fe New Mexican, June 3, 1932.
20. Albuquerque Tribune, February 17, 1933.
21. Albuquerque Tribune, December 12, 1932; Santa Fe New Mexican, December 13, 1932.
22. J.J. Clancy to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, December 21, 1932.
23. Ernest C. Garcia to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, December 29, 1933.
24. University of New Mexico Mirage, 1933, p. 221.
25. Ibid; New Mexico Lobo, January 6, March 31, 1933.
26. New Mexico Lobo, April 13, 28, 1933; La Bandera Americana, April 27, 1933.
27. Tibo Chavez, Oral History Interview, July 26, 1982.
28. While New Mexico histories recognize the ethnic advocacy of Governor Octaviano Larrazolo and Senator Dennis Chavez, they have yet to write the chapter in between these two figures in which it was the Progressive Republicans as a collectivity that carried the banner of Spanish-American rights forthrightly.
29. Jack E. Holmes, Politics in New Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), pp. 160-174.
30. Senate Journal, Eleventh Legislature, Senate Bill #71, New Mexico Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
31. Albuquerque Tribune, January 26, 1933.
32. Santa Fe New Mexican, January 27, 1933.
33. Santa Fe New Mexican, January 31, 1933.
34. Albuquerque Tribune, January 27, 1933.
35. Albuquerque Tribune, February 2, 1933; Santa Fe New Mexican, February 2, 3, 1933.
36. Albuquerque Journal, January 29, 1933.
37. Virginia Mainz to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, January 29, 1933.
38. Santa Fe New Mexican, February 17, 1933.

39. Santa Fe New Mexican, Albuquerque Journal, February 23, 1933.
40. Fred Barela to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, January 30, 1933.
41. Albuquerque Journal, March 7, 1933; New Mexico Senate Journal, 11th New Mexico Legislature, p. 471.
42. New Mexico Legislative Records, House Resolution #17, 1933, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
43. Alice M. Mares to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, January 28, 1933; T.H.S. Chavez to The Public Forum, Albuquerque Tribune, January 29, 1933.
44. This protest is documented in Phillip B. Gonzales, "A Perfect Furor of Indignation." For brief references to the case see Nancie L. Gonzalez, The Spanish-Americans of New Mexico, pp. 177-178 and 204; and Carolyn Zeleny, "Relations Between Spanish-Americans and Anglo-Americans in New Mexico," pp. 339-340.
45. Albuquerque Journal, April 28, 1933.
46. Albuquerque Journal, April 28, 1933.
47. As a "syndrome," the Spanish Heritage is made up various elements that were more clearly emphasized by some groups and not by others in the period under investigation here. For example, it appears that the Progressive Spanish-language newspapers eschewed the intellectually debatable terminology of 'Spanish' or 'Espanol' in favor of 'Hispano-Americano.' They also used 'nuestro pueblo and 'nuestra raza' frequently. But they shared in the reliance on the 'nativo' in order to emphasize political rights most clearly. It could be that the newspapers agreed with the critique of the Spanish Fantasy Heritage but found it politically disadvantageous to push it in public. Here is another interesting question for future research on the development of identity in New Mexico.