



Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930

Gilbert G. González

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A history of the Chicano community cannot be complete without taking into account the United States' domination of the Mexican economy beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writes Gilbert G. González. For that economic conquest inspired U.S. writers to create a "culture of empire" that legitimated American dominance by portraying Mexicans and Mexican immigrants as childlike "peons" in need of foreign tutelage, incapable of modernizing without Americanizing, that is, submitting to the control of U.S. capital. So powerful was and is the culture of empire that its messages about Mexicans shaped U.S. public policy, particularly in education, throughout the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first.

In this stimulating history, Gilbert G. González traces the development of the culture of empire and its effects on U.S. attitudes and policies toward Mexican immigrants. Following a discussion of the United States' economic conquest of the Mexican economy, González examines several hundred pieces of writing by American missionaries, diplomats, business people, journalists, academics, travelers, and others who together created the stereotype of the Mexican peon and the perception of a "Mexican problem." He then fully and insightfully discusses how this misinformation has shaped decades of U.S. public policy toward Mexican immigrants and the Chicano (now Latino) community, especially in terms of the way university training of school superintendents, teachers, and counselors drew on this literature in forming the educational practices that have long been applied to the Mexican immigrant community.

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