

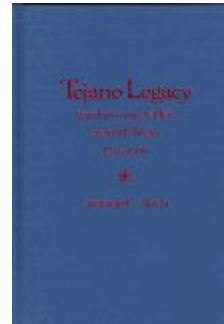
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Armando C. Alonzo.** *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. xii + 357 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-1897-8; \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1866-4.

**Armando C. Alonzo.** *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. xiii + 357 pp.

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A product of extensive research, *Tejano Legacy* provides an interesting and valuable addition to the growing body of research on Tejano history (meaning Hispanos who identify themselves as Texans). Alonzo offers a history of South Texas from the Spanish colonial era to 1900, arguing that the “importance of land or space to the settlers’ way of life and identity” is central to the theme of Tejano history (p. 3). He supports this theme by looking at land tenure among large, medium, and small land holdings in the trans-Nueces region utilizing data from wills, tax records, census, bills of sale, and many other sources. Holding onto their land allowed Tejanos to maintain historical and cultural identities that remain strong even today. Preserving their ownership would prove to be difficult, however, especially after the 1880s, when greater numbers of Anglo-Americans and Europeans came into the region hoping to invest their merchant dollars into land speculation. Numerous factors led to the decline of acreage owned by Tejanos, not the least of which was the partition of larger estates through inheritance (and subsequent sale) and inadequate access to credit to carry Tejanos through deteriorating market conditions.

Divided into nine chapters, this book covers the original settlement of South Texas under the leadership of Jose de Escandon in the 1730s to the decline of Tejano land holdings by 1900. Organized topically, the chapters deal with environment and people of the Seno Mexicano; the origins and establishment of Spanish communities (1730-1848); economic life (1730-1848); population growth, adaptation, and conflict (1848-1900); Anglo-American challenges to Mexican land holdings after 1846; expan-

sion of Tejano ranching (1845-1885); the decline of Tejano ranching (1885-1900); and finally an interesting comparison of Hispano landholding throughout the Southwest. Replete with tables and diagrams carefully weaved into the narrative, this monograph provides an interesting and very detailed look at South Texas, in particular Hidalgo County. Each chapter begins with a clear thesis which he follows methodically throughout. The author ends each chapter with a conclusion in which he provides an excellent summation of each of his major arguments as well as solidifies his thesis.

Throughout this book, Alonzo overcomes and refutes misinterpretations of authors who view conflict as a central theme to Tejano history and who claim that Tejano land loss in South Texas was comparatively worse than other locations throughout the Southwest. He further argues that his book provides a more in-depth look into Tejano land tenure than have previous studies. He concludes that “Tejanos in the Lower Valley participated in an expanding commercial ranching economy and that they maintained control of their lands in much of the region until the 1880s. Shaped by their colonial experience, Tejanos were a resilient, pragmatic, and largely self-directed people” (p. 11). He writes that the history of Tejanos is one of persistence and survival.

This well-written monograph helps to bring Tejano land tenure in South Texas into focus. Alonzo’s impressive supporting data includes tables depicting livestock sold in various counties during certain years, occupational structures, population, percentage of Hispanos and

Anglos in various occupations, land holdings by size and ethnicity in various years, ethnicity of livestock owners, percentage of livestock sale by ethnicity, and more. Most of his information represents Hidalgo County, but he also includes information from the other lower valley counties as well. His breakdown of ethnicity in relationship to land tenure and livestock production and sale is particularly intriguing. The tables are incredibly informative and I respect the tremendous amount of time they must have consumed to compile.

While reading the book, no doubt certain questions come to mind. Admittedly, Alonzo's focus is the Tejano community. However, as a Native American historian, I would like to have seen more information about the early native communities who lived in the area. He includes one short section in his first chapter about the Coahuiltecans who lived in the region, but does not describe their lifestyle in any detail. It would have been interesting to learn about how they survived in this region as a counterpoint to later Tejano settlements. Perhaps archaeological data or anthropological studies are scarce. Alonzo also mentions the Lipan Apache and Comanche raids on Tejano livestock and communities as well, yet he does not explain the events which might have precipitated the increased raids, particularly in the 1830s. This no doubt occurred as a result of the shifting native populations on the Plains, as well as numerous other factors. In New Mexico, Nuevo Mexicanos punished the Apache, Navajo, Ute, and Comanche for raiding Hispano settlements. Did the same retaliatory raids occur in South Texas? Perhaps the early population was too small, or perhaps because Tejanos moved from community land holdings to individual grants very early in South Texas history, community outrage and a smaller population base did not support a counterraid mentality.

Tejanos built a sense of community through their shared struggle. Besides the raids, periodic droughts and floods decreased production and influenced local and regional markets in South Texas and areas south. Of greater impact to Tejano landholding, however, was the arrival of outsiders into the region. Alonzo demonstrates convincingly that the arrival of Anglos and Europeans did not immediately disrupt Tejano landholding patterns; rather, the Tejanos experienced a boom in livestock production, selling tens of thousands of sheep and cattle to regional and extra regional markets. It appears that Tejanos who prospered had diversified to horses as well as cattle and undertaken other economic ventures. More importantly, the expansion of markets after 1848 and the coming of farmers kept their local market vi-

able. While outsiders eventually disrupted land tenure and treated Tejanos as second-class citizens (because of their lack of power), Alonzo makes an interesting argument about Tejano class structures—that the frontier lessened the importance of color within Tejano communities. Well-supported with evidence, this thesis should be compared to other frontier regions of the Spanish Borderlands, and perhaps even to the American West on a larger scale. While I doubt researchers would find the same result throughout the West (or even the Borderlands), Alonzo has found something unique if indeed that is the case—and his evidence seems to support it. It would appear that the necessity of building economic viability and expanding the frontier of Spanish authority outweighed the importance of racial and class distinctions. It also appears, however, that once the communities became firmly established, race and class distinctions emerged.

Some limitations can be found, as they can in any work of this magnitude. I have included a list of questions which the author, or members of H-Rural's membership, may feel free to address.

\* When the trade boom began in the 1820s, as it did in New Mexico, Alonzo might have expanded upon the opening of trade restrictions with other territories and more importantly, with foreign countries like the United States. In New Mexico, the Santa Fe Trail offered great trade opportunities, but Alonzo does not mention any such organized trade route of this sort. The reader might appreciate a broader perspective of the opening of trade by a comparison with other regions of Texas (as he does with his last chapter and Hispano land tenure across the Southwest).

\* Why is there a new intensity of Indian raids in the 1830s?

\* What new laws regulated U.S. activities in Texas after the initial settlement by impresarios and how did that affect South Texas? (Perhaps it did not).

\* What roles did women play in the livestock industry and land tenure in South Texas. While women were mentioned in regard to wills and inheritance (as widows or sisters, etc.), it would be interesting to know how many of the sales bills, signed by men, actually represented women or widows selling livestock or land. Since many men did serve as business agents for women (either as brothers, sons, or uncles, etc.), however, as in New Mexico, it might be hard to gauge the importance of women and their land ownership in South Texas.

\* Did new U.S. probate laws alter inheritance practices?

\* Did schools provide English-only education? Were they compulsory? Since no Tejanos taught in these schools, did fewer numbers of Tejano children attend school? Was attendance based on class and if so, did those who had attended school as children fare better as adults in maintaining land holdings?

\* Alonzo argued that in the case of Texas, "equity favored Tejano landholders." Why was there a desire for equity in South Texas? Is that a result of lesser demand for land by Anglo interlopers? In the case of New Mexico, which served as a through-route for the newly-opened Santa Fe Trail and later the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, pressure on land grew with larger populations of Anglo-Americans and Europeans. Obviously South Texas was not a through-route, nor a destination for merchants and gold miners as California. To be fair, Alonzo does make the second point, but I'm curious as to how Tejano land tenure was influenced by the fact that South Texas might still be considered a frontier much later than New Mexico.

\* In New Mexico, land fraud abounded. In South Texas, it doesn't seem to be the case. Did fraudulent land claims resulting from quick adjudication in South Texas exist? Whatever happened to the land claims in Rio Grande City? Were they ever adjudicated?

\* Why was it easier to speculate in unconfirmed

grants or land in New Mexico than in Texas? Tejanos were not colonized by the Anglo-Americans they encountered. They persevered until the livestock industry and local and regional markets declined after 1885. Their smaller land holdings and inability to acquire credit caused the decline in Tejano land tenure in South Texas.

To support his work, Alonzo has consulted major monographs, well-known to scholars of the Borderlands and Hispano land tenure (except a new book by Malcolm Ebricht entitled, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico*, which would have provided an excellent counterpoint for comparison in his final chapter). Alonzo's monograph will direct the reader to new and fascinating information regarding South Texas and Tejano land tenure, as well as the historic economic and environmental viability of the region. This is a must read for those with knowledge of land tenure of Hispanos throughout the Southwest, as well as those who would like an in-depth introduction to a viable and surviving culture—the Tejanos. The level of detail Alonzo included might be daunting to those unfamiliar with land tenure practices and Hispano culture. For those specialists of South Texas local history and scholars of land tenure in the Southwest during the transition period from Spain and Mexico to the United States, this book is a valuable source.

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