



Felipe Gonzales. *Politica: Nuevomexicanos and American Political Incorporation, 1821-1910.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. xxii + 1053 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-8465-4.

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A History of the New Mexican Elites in American Politics

In *Politica: Nuevomexicanos and American Political Incorporation, 1821-1910*, Phillip B Gonzales seeks to detail a narrative history of Nuevomexicano political participation in the American political system from the end of the US-Mexican War to the dawn of New Mexican statehood. More specifically, Gonzales has written an eight-hundred-page homage to New Mexico's most prominent nineteenth-century political Hispano figures, and he argues that these figures embraced the American two-party system and utilized it to open a power-sharing relationship with the American authorities. Gonzales openly declares that his purpose in completing this book is more than just academic: as he tells us, this is his attempt to metamorphose Nuevomexicano political figures from the *herencia* (local heritage) into part of the *querencia* (beloved and distinct local identity). What follows is a heavily detailed celebration of Nuevomexicano engagement, politicking, and ultimately agency that will make the descendants of these political figures proud.

According to Gonzales, by 1846 Nuevomexicanos were already engaged in political discourse across all classes, specifically over the issue of American military rule. Gonzales notes that one of the earliest debates, as to whether New Mexico would be better served to become a state or a territory, was raging by 1848 and that elections were already hotly contested in these initial years of territorialization. Gonzales astutely utilizes Laura Gomez's framework of power-sharing (*Manifest Destinies*, 2008),

arguing that New Mexicans recognized that the political system was the key to maintaining some level of power and autonomy in their homeland. Gomez argues that, within the context of the court system, Nuevomexicanos were excluded from the highest offices, and Gonzales applies her framework of a glass ceiling to New Mexican politics and society as a whole (p. 3). In doing so, Gonzales situates the relationship between Americans and large landholding Nuevomexicanos in the category of unequal power-sharing. However, he contends that Americans only shared power because Nuevomexicanos outnumbered them, and as a result they needed the Hispanos help to maintain order in the territory.

Within this framework follows a lengthy history of the different political factions of Nuevomexicanos and their political Anglo allies. Part 1, entitled "Initializing Annexation," recounts the earliest days of contact between Nuevomexicano elites and their American occupiers. Herein, Gonzales seeks to find political order in what was a complex time with ever-changing allegiances. Part 2, "Politica in the Ante Bellum," focuses on the emergence of the Mexican Democratic Party and the American Democratic Party. Gonzales contends that the goal of "statehood citizenship" ignited political activity in New Mexico that resulted in the construction of a functional political system (p. 178). Part 3, "Party Modalities in the Time of Civil War," contextualizes New Mexico within the broader trend of the nation and recounts the desta-

bilizing effect of sectionalism and the Civil War on New Mexico's political parties. Part 4, "Political Agonism under Reconstruction," focuses on political discord in the wake of the Civil War, specifically through the careers of José Francisco Chávez and Charles Clever. Finally, part 5, simply titled "Arriving," recounts the rise of the Republican Party and the solidification of the two-party system in New Mexico. Gonzales concludes with a sweeping glance at the last forty years leading up to statehood, where he briefly recounts the flood of Anglo migration, the marginalization of Nuevomexicanos, and ultimately the deaths of the most prominent Nuevomexicano political figures.

The strength of the book is its extensive engagement with, and ultimately summation of, New Mexico's vast historiography: indeed, Gonzales utilizes a wealth of secondary sources, including unpublished theses and dissertations. Gonzales combines these with readings of newspapers, military records, and political papers to weave a narrative that captures the current state of the New Mexican historiography. It is no exaggeration to say that the bibliography alone is worth the price of the book. It is an excellent resource for any scholar who wishes to study nineteenth-century New Mexico. But more than that, Gonzales skillfully weaves together narratives of many of New Mexico's most important nineteenth-century moments. His strongest and most original contributions come as the book progresses toward the Civil War, when he situates the debates in New Mexico in the context of the national rhetoric. Indeed, the further one advances into the chapters, the more surefooted the narrative becomes.

An ambitious book of this length and scope is bound to have some controversial points of contention, and *Politica* is not short on these. For example, and as Gonzales himself notes, the idea that political parties solidified so soon after the arrival of the Americans is bound to have its critics. Were Nuevomexicanos really passionate about American liberalism, Republicanism, and national politics, or did they simply adopt the framework and language of the American political system because it was pragmatic to do so? Can one envision a scenario whereby large landholding elites, who had wealth, influence, horses, and guns (and men willing to fire them), would have been excluded from the local system of governance, regardless of what form that took? Interestingly, Gonzales seems to find benevolence in the manner Americans allowed power to be shared, but a survey of American history tells us that when Americans have the power to dispossess conquered peoples, they do

so without mercy. Indeed, perhaps the notion of pragmatism and self-interest, rather than a passion for political ideologies, would go a long way toward explaining Nuevomexicanos' ever-shifting position on slavery and ultimately their willingness to abandon the laws they had passed to protect what few black slaveholders there were in New Mexico. It would seem these laws suited their needs when they sought to cozy up to the southern states, but in truth had no practical impact on the daily life in the territory. Critics will note that the early political era may have been a bit messier than Gonzales contends, and that Nuevomexicano politicians may have been a bit more self-interested than Gonzales portrays.

Additionally, no doubt there are scholars that will take issue with Gonzales's categorization of New Mexico's political elites and their families as being subaltern in relation to their American occupiers, especially considering the vast wealth, political influence, and power-sharing Gonzales celebrates in *Politica*. Gonzales seems to err in the size of New Mexico's wealthy elite. Based on his reading of Deena Gonzalez, he estimates that the large landholding class stood at a mere 5 percent, but Deena Gonzalez is specifically referring to women in Santa Fe County proper, and excludes the male landholders who made up the decided majority in 1850.[1] According to the 1850 Census, at least 20 percent of the total Santa Fe County population owned sizable amounts of land (worth more than \$100). Moreover, Gonzales's categorization of Manuel Armijo and numerous others as loyal Mexicans in the tradition of Mexico's *hombres de bien* will likely raise eyebrows among both Mexicanists and Chicano scholars, while his focus on prominent politicians at the expense of everyday Nuevomexicanos is bound to rankle New Mexico's Chicano activists.

In the end, *Politica* is an extremely valuable book and should be added to the library of any scholar who is serious about studying New Mexican history. While the size may dissuade casual readers, scholars will likely find numerous intersections between his work and their own. Indeed, *Politica* leaves room for future scholars to both tell the stories of non-elite Nuevomexicanos and to critically examine how the policies of these political figures impacted the lives of everyday Nuevomexicanos. The incredible level of research Gonzales has done is a boon for us all, and through his citations and bibliography you will find a map to both the archives and the secondary literature.

Whether Gonzales was successful in his primary goal of transmuted Nuevomexicano politicians from the

fringe herencia into part of the querencia, only time will tell. What is certain is that Gonzales has written a book that future scholars of nineteenth-century New Mexico will need to reckon with, even if they disagree with his findings.

Note

[1]. Deena J. Gonzalez, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86.

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