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Review - *The Mexicans in Oklahoma*

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REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS.

THE MEXICANS IN OKLAHOMA

— Reviewed by Lee Daniel

Smith, Michael M. *THE MEXICANS IN OKLAHOMA*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Paper. 78 pp. \$3.95.

This slim volume by Michael M. Smith is composed of six chapters and a bibliographical essay, is part of a series entitled *NEWCOMERS TO A NEW LAND*, which analyzes the various ethnic groups that have contributed to the history of Oklahoma. It is an introductory survey that begins in 1541 with the arrival of the Spaniards — the first Europeans to enter Oklahoma — and continues through the 1970s. Despite its brevity, the book is the first serious study of the role of Mexicans in Oklahoma; and the author's announced intention is to encourage others "to examine more carefully Mexican contributions to the state's economic development and cultural heritage."

Chapter 1, entitled "Oklahoma and Mexico: A Distant Relationship," provides an account of the presence of Mexicans in Oklahoma until 1900. Smith points out that Mexico and Oklahoma "shared an intermittent, albeit subtle, relationship" from Coronado's 1541 entrance into Oklahoma until the present century. Despite the many romantic legends, scant evidence is available to verify the existence of Mexicans in Oklahoma during the more than 300 years following Coronado's arrival.

In Chapter 2, "Historical Antecedents to Mexican Migration," is found an account of the conditions in Mexico that created the impetus for the large immigrations of Mexicans at the beginning of the 20th century into the U.S. and eventually Oklahoma — poor economic conditions and the 1910 revolution.

Chapter 3, "Migration and Settlement in Oklahoma," details the developments in the U.S. and Mexico that coalesced in the early years of the 1900's to cause the massive

immigrations of Mexicans. Although most of the chapter is devoted to the conditions and activities in what Smith labels the "vast geo-cultural region historically designated the Spanish Borderlands," it is assumed that, in a minimal way, the same occurred in Oklahoma. Certainly, as the state grew and the economy increased, the need for more workers, occasioned by the U.S. immigration restrictions of cheap labor from Europe and the Orient, Mexicans were the answer. Also, the 1910 revolution displaced many Mexicans and discouraged their immediate return to Mexico. This development proved ideal because the outbreak of World War I caused a greater and extended demand for workers who normally returned after brief periods of employment.

In Chapter 4, "Mexican Labor in Oklahoma: 1900-1945," the author considers the Mexican role in the economic development of Oklahoma through their two major areas of employment — the railroad maintenance crews and the coal mines. The majority of the railroad crews were Spanish-speaking, which prompted the Santa Fe to issue Spanish-English dictionaries to their foremen. A significant segment of the coal miners were also Mexicans who were recruited from the railroad crews. Mexicans also worked in numerous unskilled jobs in industries, packinghouses, municipal services, and domestic employment until the Great Depression, when most were forced to leave the state.

In "Social and Cultural Adjustments: 1900-1945," Chapter 5, is found a glimpse of the average Mexican living in Oklahoma. The large majority had been campesinos, didn't seek citizenship, maintained strong bonds of loyalty to Mexico, returned frequently to renew their cultural roots, and infrequently learned to speak or read English — a major obstacle to adjustment to American culture. The implications of the celebrations, songs, organizations, and the Catholic Church that served the Mexican immigrants are also discussed.

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It is obvious in Chapter 6, "The Mexican Experience Since World War II," that the second World War was as significant an event in the lives of Mexicans in Oklahoma as the Mexican revolution, World War I, and the depression had been. During the postwar period, due to large Mexican-American military participation, the use of the G.I. Bill accounted for the unprecedented numbers receiving an education that ultimately led to white-collar professions. By the third generation many families had undergone almost total assimilation. However, Smith points out that the great influx of Mexicans coming from other states beginning in the 1970s and 80s is changing the situation dramatically. "The cultural pride of the state's older Mexican families, the constant influx of Mexican-American immigrants, and the enhanced consciousness of the Chicano movement have all served to maintain a strong ethnic tradition with Oklahoma's Mexican community."

The study concludes with the "Bibliographical Essay," which is provided to aid those who wish to learn more about the history, culture, and impact of the Mexicans. The book also contains ten photographs and seven maps.

There seems to be little documented evidence of the Mexicans in Oklahoma, and Smith has resorted to personal interviews of those who lived the Mexican experience to compensate for the lack of written accounts. He acknowledges that the present study is an introductory survey and concludes that "In sum, nearly everything needs to be done." His purpose in the book is to indicate the need for further research and encourage others to seek new materials that will provide a better understanding of the Mexican's role in Oklahoma. Nevertheless, the book is recommended reading for all Oklahomans who, every increasingly so, need to understand and be more aware of the estimated 100,000 - 200,000 Hispanics now

living in the state. Though largely ignored by scholars, the Mexicans have left a marked impact on the state's history, and by virtue of their numbers alone, the former "invisible minority" will be an important factor in Oklahoma's future. Unlike the other ethnic minorities, the Mexicans continue to enter the state and their history is still being written. The 78-page book may be ordered in paperback for \$3.95 from the O.U. Press.

WILL ROGERS MAGAZINE ARTICLES II

— Reviewed by Dr. Jerry Nye

Rogers, Will. Will Rogers' Weekly Articles: The Coolidge Years: 1925 - 1927 (II), ed. James M. Smallwood. Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1980.

Will Rogers is undoubtedly the most famous native son that Oklahoma has produced. Nearly fifty years after his death, Will Rogers is still internationally famous. Remembered best as a humorist and lecturer, Rogers was also a popular star of vaudeville, motion pictures, and radio as well as an author of books, magazine articles, and newspaper columns. His weekly syndicated newspaper column was carried by approximately 600 newspapers.

Will Rogers' Weekly Articles: The Coolidge Years is a collection of the columns which he wrote from 1925 to 1927. Rogers himself explained the runaway success of the column: "When I first started out to write and misspelled a few words, people said I was plain ignorant. But when I got all the words wrong, they declared I was a humorist."

The columns collected in this volume illustrate the qualities which so endeared Rogers to his readers. Beginning many of his columns with "All I know is what I read in the papers," Rogers used his homespun humor and down-to-earth philosophy to poke good-na-