

Narrativizing the History of South Texas:

Representations of Resistance and Racial Identity in *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero*

by:

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Abstract

Both Américo Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* and Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero: A Historical Novel* are marked by doubled textual histories. Each novel was written in the 1930s but not published until the 1990s. Both texts faced difficulty in getting published and when they appeared, neither novel received significant critical attention, which raises the question of why these works have been so undervalued. This thesis explores surprising and paradoxical answers to this question as it relates to the gendered, racialized history of Chican@ culture, while elaborating a more precise understanding of both texts as internally divided, resistant, and complementary.

While a binary construction of Mexican-American identity leads to exclusionary depictions of Chican@ borderland experience, both *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* illuminate subtle racialized and gendered complexities that defy binaries of race and gender. My readings respond to calls from scholars for a more nuanced approach to understanding midcentury Chican@ novels. Building off Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and Susan Stanford Friedman's conceptualization of spaces of dynamic encounter, this thesis analyzes the sociopolitical and cultural implications of narrative style and argues that these dynamics helped shape the formation and representation of Chican@ identities.

The first chapter focuses on narrative style in both texts as it relates to representations of gender through the traditional Chican@ concept of *machismo*. While *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* both use omniscient narrative styles, each text problematizes Chican@ patriarchy through strikingly different formal and thematic innovations. The following chapter identifies key nuances within each text's representation of the racial complexities of Chican@ identity and argues that representational aspects structure the historical narrative of the borderland each novel constructs. In conclusion, this study develops an account for reconceptualizing narratives of the stories of the underrepresented in order to illuminate how they challenge dominant historical narratives.

Keywords: Chican@ literature, borderland literature, Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, borderland identity, racial complexity in the borderland, gender representation in Mexican-American literature

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTERS	
1. Resistance to Patriarchal <i>Autoridad</i>	8
2. Racial Complexity and Binational Collaboration	34
CONCLUSION	60
WORKS CONSULTED	63

Introduction

As Gloria Anzaldúa demonstrates in *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, “borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa Preface). Marked by racially charged and politically controversial events like the Anglo-invasion of Texas in the early 1800s, the United States’ victory in the Mexican-American War, and the passing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the border separating Texas from Mexico has long been the site of much political, physical, social, and emotional conflict. The ongoing dispute over the physical land, most notably the national border itself, between the United States and Mexico has created a distinct cultural conflict in the area, as the line between foreigner and native has been continually redrawn. In this land uncomfortably situated between two separate nations, identity becomes ambiguous and contradictory. Separate worlds pull in separate directions, forcing the inhabitants of borderlands to attempt to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable complexities of being categorized an “other” in one’s native world. This precarious state of identity has occasioned an entire genre of literature known as *Chican@*¹ borderland literature.² These works, traditionally written by individuals of Mexican descent born in the United States, attempt to negotiate the pains, triumphs, struggles, and complexities of being born into a life of otherness.

¹ Mexican-American, @ denoting either male or female (rather than the traditional, but gendered *Chicano*)

² Throughout this project, I have included various Spanish words within my English prose. I have done so because I feel that these words have importantly distinct cultural significance within a Mexican (i.e. Spanish language) context as opposed to U.S. (i.e. English language). I have included translations of such Spanish words and hope that my inclusion of them will pay homage to the Spanish-suffused texts I have chosen for this project.

Chican@ borderland literature often has been read as depicting Mexican-American identity as binary—a product of eternal limbo between Mexican and U.S. cultures—traditional Mexican ideals that encourage hyper-masculinity, piety, and patriarchy on one side, and American ideals that advocate for assimilation, monolingualism, and capitalism on the other. However, such binary conceptions of Chican@ism overlook the complexities of such works and lead to exclusionary depictions of the Chican@ experience. While some literary works that prioritize the importance of Chican@ ideals also marginalize women in their attempt to depict a culturally-rich world dominated by strong Mexican men or *caballeros*, other narratives may oversimplify Mexican-American racialization, homogenizing varied and plural social backgrounds and cultural experiences, rather than exploring the regional nuances and ethnic complexities inherently present.

Critics of Chican@ discourse³ have categorized Mexican-American works as examples of resistance to the Anglo-American forces that continually oppress free expression of Mexican identity. While certain Chican@ texts are undoubtedly examples of politicized defiance of Anglo-American hegemony, critics such as María Cotera, José Limón, and Ralph Rodriguez believe that Chicano discourse has become too reliant on interpreting texts in ways that align comfortably with the major tenets of the Chican@ movement. In her essay, “Recovering ‘Our History: *Caballero* and the Gendered Politics of Form,” María Cotera explains the ways in which the tendency to read “through the optic of the Mexican-American experience” as singular can become problematic (“Recovering” 162). José Limón, in “Border Literary Histories,

³ Ramón Saldívar and José David Saldívar to name a few highlighted in José Limón’s “Border Literary Histories, Globalization, and Critical Regionalism.” María Cotera’s “Recovering ‘Our’ History: *Caballero* and the Gendered Politics of Form” also outlines texts that disrupt the traditional conception of the Chican@ canon.

Globalization, and Critical Regionalism” formulates the concept “hurried globalization” or the tendency to overlook important regional nuances in effort to paint regions as unified and resistant (“Border Literary Histories” 164). In response to the identification of such problems, Ralph Rodriguez⁴ has called on critics to construct a more innovative approach to Chicano@ texts that allows for a variety of interpretations and understandings of these complicated pieces.

In this project, I argue that Américo Paredes’s novel, *George Washington Gómez* and Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s text, *Caballero: A Historical Novel*,⁵ both written in the 1930s and published in the 1990s, challenge binarized, exclusionary conceptions of Mexican-American identity in consequentially divergent narrative forms. Ultimately, my approach reads these two Chicano@ novels with parallel literary histories as developing a crucial textual dialogue in order to illuminate the ways in which each novel implicitly critiques the gendered and racialized complexities of the other. I argue that a discussion of *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* need not position the texts as simply oppositional—one a masculinist, regressive text, the other a progressive, feminist text or vice-versa: an anti-essentialist, mixed-race novel versus one based on racialist tendencies. While I recognize that my emphasis of politically progressive elements of *George Washington Gómez* is unconventional and perhaps controversial, I hope that my analysis ignites a new kind of conversation around these two novels and literary historical valuations—a conversation that allows each text to complement the other, rather than a conversation that necessitates that one devalue or minimize the importance of the other.

Set in the borderland of Brownsville, Texas, Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez* follows the Gómez family in the 1930s and their struggles as they attempt to survive the

⁴ See Rodriguez

⁵ Referred to as *Caballero* throughout the rest of the piece

aftermath of the Anglo-American invasion of the Rio Grande Valley region. The novel takes as its protagonist, George, known to his family as Guálinto, the son of Gumersindo and María Gómez. Given a nationally heroic name at his birth, Guálinto's family is convinced that he will grow up to be a great man for his people. When Guálinto's father dies, Guálinto's uncle, Feliciano, vows to raise him as a great man. As the novel develops, Guálinto faces repeated adversity, persecuted by his Anglo school teachers, taunted for his American name, and rejected for his Mexican heritage. At the novel's conclusion, Guálinto, now calling himself George, works as a border security agent for the U.S. government and has effectively abandoned his Mexican identity. Similarly situated in the borderland Rio Grande Valley area, is Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero*—a collaborative text that follows the Mendoza y Soría family, set at the time leading up to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American war. The patriarch of the family, Don Santiago, struggles to accept his changing world, as his children form relationships with U.S. Americans, his widowed sister decides to remarry, and his wife supports each of the aforementioned decisions.

Paredes's novel is, today, considered a canonical text, praised for its depiction of the Texas-Mexican experience as a struggle to balance and negotiate between two worlds. Critics María Herrera-Sobek and Ramón Saldívar praise Paredes as a "precursor of Chicano literature" and commend the novel as an impressive reinterpretation "of the traditional bildungsroman in the context of race, ethnicity, and gender formation under conditions of colonial dominance and at the dawn of America's emergence as a global power" (Herrera-Sobek 239, Saldívar 17). What is less celebrated, however, is Paredes's depiction of women and his lack of explicit attention to the specific injustices plaguing Chicanas. González and Raleigh's text, on the other hand, has yet to receive the status of Paredes's *George Washington Gómez*, though it explicitly focuses on the

plight of Chicana women. María Cotera, who co-edited *Caballero*, advocates for the text's importance in Chicana literary history, writing in the text's epilogue that it is "an early, and important, attempt to give a voice to the Chicana speaking subject during a historical period which witnessed the rise of nationalist movements among Tejanos in response to U.S. imperialism" ("Hombres Necios" 339).

Caballero and *George Washington Gómez* have, sparingly,⁶ been put into conversation before this project; however, this conversation too often draws a distinction between the two pieces, ultimately framing the texts as oppositional—*George Washington Gómez* failing to accomplish what *Caballero* does. In my first chapter, I argue that this framing mechanism ignores important ways in which *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* occupy a similarly progressive, resistant space, a space that refuses to conform to dominant, patriarchal Chicano culture. Framing the texts as complementary rather than purely oppositional allows each text to illuminate the other. *Caballero*'s blatant critique of Chicano culture highlights *George Washington Gómez*'s more subtle exposure of the ways in which Chicano patriarchy is problematic, while *George Washington Gómez*'s portrayal of white Texans as fueled by racism makes *Caballero*'s representation of an empathetic cross-cultural understanding stand out as revolutionary. I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, Susan Stanford Friedman's conceptualization of the geographies of identity, and Kent Puckett's discussion of narrative theory to argue for the implications of particular narrative choices in *Caballero* and *George*

⁶ The following list is not meant to be an all-inclusive list of every work that has included both novels, but rather, those that I have found particularly insightful: Monika Kaup's "The Unsustainable Hacienda," José E. Limón's *Américo Paredes, Culture and Critique*, María Cotera's "Recovering 'Our' History: *Caballero* and the Gendered Politics of Form," Jose E. Limón's use of Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand* in his article "Mexicans, Foundational Fictions, and the United States: *Caballero*, a Late Border Romance"

Washington Gómez and to extend my analysis beyond aesthetic value into a sociopolitical realm that deals with questions of gender, power, and cultural values.

While *Caballero* is occasionally recognized for its progressive use of resistant female Chicana characters, it is also criticized by scholars such as Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez for its racist tendencies that erase “Indians and blacks as historical subjects in the making of South Texas” (Guidotti-Hernández 139). My second chapter focuses on the formation of Mexican-American identity as it relates to the complex, racially-charged history of the Texas-Mexico borderland. I argue that González and Raleigh’s text relies on a racial binary to define the Mexican-American experience. This binary portrayal over-homogenizes the Chican@ experience, largely ignoring the role of African Americans and Indians in the history of the South Texas borderland. González and Raleigh do, however, imagine a future in which Mexican-American collaboration, racial inclusion, and social mobility are possible—challenging traditional Chican@ ideals through the vehicle of resistant characters. *George Washington Gómez*, on the other hand, constructs a racially inclusive narrative of the borderland experience. I rely on Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of *La Malinche* to contextualize the Chican@ experience as it pertains to the complex gendered and racialized history of the South Texas borderland to highlight Paredes’s racially pluralistic representation of Chican@ identity. Though nuanced in his portrayal of Chican@ identity, Paredes largely represents Mexican and American identity as oppositional, ultimately suggesting binational collaboration is impossible.

In my discussion of *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez* I illuminate the ways in which presenting the texts not as oppositional—as this kind of interpretation is problematic and reductive—but complementary allows each text to highlight key complexities in the other. *Caballero*’s pronounced resistance to patriarchal authority highlights *George Washington*

Gómez's similar critique through its more subtle exposure of the challenges associated with patriarchy. *George Washington Gómez*'s racially pluralist and inclusive portrayal of Chican@ identity illuminates the ways that *Caballero* oversimplifies the racial complexity of the South Texas borderland. Both texts narrativize the history of South Texas, *Caballero* imagining a collaborative future in a time when this coexistence felt impossible; *George Washington Gómez* identifying the challenges still facing Mexicans in the borderlands.

Both González and Raleigh's *Caballero* and Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* were published belatedly, Paredes's novel was written in and about the 1930s but not published until 1990 by Arte Publico Press, and *Caballero*, similarly written in the 1930s, though set during the 1846-1848 period in borderland history, was not published until the 1990s by Texas A&M University Press ("Recovering" 159). *Caballero* is a work of historical fiction, though the text's narrative was informed by the authors' experience in the 20th century. *George Washington Gómez*, on the other hand, is a work in which Paredes attempts to portray a contemporary picture of his present, though his narrative was influenced by his conceptualization of the past. Each text faced difficulty in getting published and still, neither novel received great critical attention upon publication, raising the question of why they have been undervalued. What about *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* made readers and/or editors reluctant to accept the texts as profound Chican@ border writing? My project explores this question as it relates to the gendered, racialized history of Chican@ culture while arguing for an understanding of the two novels as complementary—occupying a similarly resistant space of negotiation.

**Chapter One:
Resistance to Patriarchal *Autoridad***

*She inculcated the doctrine of traditionalism in the children—religion, gentility, family rank, patriarchalism—those were the good things, the only ones.
(González and Raleigh 21)*

Characterized by a sense of ambiguity—connected to two cultures yet belonging to neither one—Chican@s have historically struggled to establish an assured identity in an Anglo-dominated world. Repeatedly marginalized, silenced, and ignored, Chican@ culture, and thus Chican@ literature, is defined by shared struggles and attempted resistance. Chican@ scholar, Juan Bruce-Novoa, writes, “Chicano literature is a ritual of communal cohesion and transcendence in the face of constant threats to existence” (Bruce-Novoa 81). Chican@ texts that are most often read and celebrated are those that propose a vehement rhetoric of resistance against dominant Anglo-American, monolingual discourse. This resistance, though impassioned and fervent, oftentimes perpetuates certain regressive ideals that have historically characterized Chican@ culture. Perhaps the most pronounced of these ideals is the concept of *machismo* or the traditional Chican@ concept that places men in the sole position of power in Chican@ culture. The position of patriarch is both a privilege and a curse, for the man is expected to assume responsibility for the economic, physical, and emotional well-being of his entire household. He is expected to be strong, to maintain a stoic façade, to be utterly and completely masculine. Despite these great expectations, Chican@ literature oftentimes glorifies *machismo* as a position of prestige and honor and consequently places women in a subordinate position to men. In this chapter, I argue that Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez* and Jovita González and Eve

Raleigh's *Caballero*,⁷ both borderland *Tejana*⁸ texts, present resistance to this glorification of *machismo*, albeit through importantly distinct mechanisms.

A close-reading of each novel's narrative style highlights the two novels' differing approaches to undermining patriarchal *autoridad*.⁹ While both novels' authors employ omniscient narrators to recount a story of the Mexican-American experience, Paredes limits his narration to male characters while González and Raleigh include the musings of both men and women. González and Raleigh's narrative style that includes sporadic interjections of both males' and females' internal thoughts allows the novel to communicate resistance to traditional patriarchal ideals, some of which highlighted in this chapter's epigraph, through both the Mexican and American perspective, while also emphasizing the subordination of Chicana women. *George Washington Gómez*, on the other hand, leaves the female Chicana experience largely deemphasized, instead focusing on the pressures placed on Chicano men. Rather than focusing on the limitations placed on women, Paredes's omniscient, male narration sheds light on the inner turmoil associated with being the *patrón*¹⁰ of *la familia*¹¹ shifting the focus to the gravity of the expectations of the role. I call on theorist Kent Puckett's proposal of narrative theory to support my discussion as an analysis of how "the events, the actions, the agents, and the objects that make up the stuff of a given narrative" should be considered as they are "selected, arranged, and represented" in relation to their "historical, political, psychological, social, or scientific" agenda to extend my discussion of narrative style beyond aesthetic value

⁷ Mexican gentleman

⁸ Refers to the borderland between Mexico and Texas, another way of invoking "Mexico-Texan"

⁹ Authority

¹⁰ Boss, employer, owner

¹¹ The family

into a sociopolitical realm with cultural implications that influences how history is constructed and represented (Puckett 2).

While *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* have been put into conversation before, this conversation often frames the texts as oppositional without recognizing the ways in which they might present resistance to the same Chican@ ideals. In her essay, “The Unsustainable *Hacienda*:¹² The Rhetoric of Progress in Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s *Caballero*,” Monika Kaup frames “*Caballero* as a feminist counternarrative to Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez*” (Kaup 579). She argues that “*Caballero*’s modernism and emergent feminist critique of Mexican tradition contrast with *George Washington Gómez*’s affirmation of the authority of Mexican tradition over its failed eponymous modern hero” (Kaup 579). I argue that a discussion of *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* need not position the texts as oppositional—one a masculinist, regressive text, the other a progressive, feminist text. The very fact that *George Washington Gómez*’s “modern hero” fails to become a so-called “great man of his people” conveys Paredes’s critique of the unrealistic nature of the expectations placed on Chicano men and complicates the categorization of the novel’s portrayal of Chican@ life as an affirmation of the authority of Mexican tradition. Guálinto’s failure, especially when considered alongside his father’s death and Uncle Feliciano’s unfavorable plight, is indicative of a cultural critique—one that is not entirely dissimilar to that which is communicated through the vehicle of strong, defiant female characters in *Caballero*.

That *George Washington Gómez* is narrated primarily through a male perspective, even in moments that highlight female oppression, calls attention to the intense pressures placed on the patriarch of *la familia*. While most read Paredes’s novel as exhibiting masculinist tendencies

¹² Ranch, plantation

that serve only to subordinate women, I argue that Paredes's text does not blindly uphold traditional Mexican conceptions of authority. Paredes's narrative choice, though perhaps limiting in that the novel can serve only as a one-sided exposé, does not render the novel incapable of performing a progressive critique of Chicana@ culture. In narrating the novel primarily through male characters, Paredes seems to make a conscious choice to highlight the Chicano experience—one that is plagued by the culture's endorsement of the belief that a man must serve as the sole protector, provider, and public face of *una familia*. Throughout the novel, Guálinto's sisters' lives are narrated only in relation to his own. Take, for example, a seemingly small moment in which the novel reads, "Guálinto wasn't the only one excited about the coming school year, he knew. So was Carmen" (Paredes 151). Rather than simply stating "Carmen was excited for the coming school year," the narration remains dominated by the male perspective, and Carmen's excitement is seen only as parallel, second, and subject to her brother's. When Carmen is forced to drop out of school to care for her injured mother, María, her experiences are again presented through her brother's perspective. As Uncle Feliciano states that Carmen should drop out of school because "She already has more education than any woman needs," Carmen accepts her fate, nodding quietly, and walking into the kitchen (Paredes 154). Guálinto follows his sister and offers the following consolation:

Remember when I was little...and you used to read to me from your schoolbooks and sometimes you asked Uncle Feliciano for money to buy me books you thought I should read? I'll get books for you now. And when I'm in eighth grade I'll lend you all my schoolbooks. We'll study them together. (Paredes 154)

While this scene is an example of the gendered expectations characteristic of Chicana@ culture, that Paredes continues narrating through Guálinto's perspective deemphasizes the injustice of the

limitations placed on Chicana women, exemplified through Carmen's predicament, and emphasizes the ways in which Chicano men are expected to assume responsibility for the well-being of their *familia*. Carmen's withdrawal from school means that Guálinto will be the only one of his siblings "properly" educated in an Anglo-American school system. Guálinto accepts responsibility for not only his own education but also his sister's, stating that he will "get books" for Carmen and study them with her.

The male-dominant narration in this moment also serves to highlight the inherent nature of the Chicano role of *patrón*. The role of provider in a Chicana *familia* is not chosen—it is inherited, it is expected, it is unescapable. Though Carmen picked the books for Guálinto when he was younger, she did not obtain the money to do so herself. "Remember when I was little...and you sometimes asked Uncle Feliciano for money to buy me books," the narration reads, thus highlighting that Uncle Feliciano is responsible for both the acquisition and dispersal of the family's money. Guálinto, in his promise to his sister, assumes the same responsibility, stating that he will acquire books for her now. The role of patriarch, in this moment, is passed down from one generation to the next, great expectations intact. As previously mentioned, Puckett's discussion of the narrative as having conceptual and historical significance invites readers to think about the broader social implications insinuated by this moment, including both its exemplification of patriarchal tradition and the text's consequent positioning in feminist discourse. In *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire*, Sandra Soto suggests this scene evidences the ways in which Paredes's portrayal of Guálinto serves as "an indelibly feminist move," positioning the novel as part of a wider feminist discourse (Soto 120). While Soto reads this moment as evidence of Paredes's effort to expose the injustices towards women that were products of Chican@ patriarchy, I argue that Paredes's style creates a narrative that

spends less time focusing on the lack of recognition, status, and agency given to women during this period, and more time focusing on the pressures placed on Chicano men. Paredes's "feminist move" is, at most, a paternalistic one.

Critics such as Angie Chabram-Denersesian, on the other hand, criticize Paredes for participating in the "discourse of exclusion and betrayal which assisted in displacing Chicanas...from the script of national identity" (Chabram-Denersesian 168). From this perspective, Paredes's failure to explicitly address the injustice of the circumstance of women in Chican@ culture in his narration is neglectful and irresponsible, rendering the text regressive and ultimately useless. I take issue with this devaluation of Paredes's text and argue that *George Washington Gómez* challenges traditional Chican@ discourse from within a specifically male perspective, critiquing masculinity on its own terms. *George Washington Gómez* and its male-centered narration, rather than serving as a scathing critique of the marginalization of women, instead invites and even enforces reconsideration and critique of Chicano patriarchs and their masculinist burdens in the Chican@ world, thus complicating the novel's function as an affirmation of *machismo*'s place in Chican@ culture.

Paredes's male-dominant narrative style opens up a nuanced, emotionally complex account of the patriarchal traditions of Chican@ culture. Following the moment in which Carmen is forced to drop out of high school, the omniscient narration switches to Uncle Feliciano's perspective. Instead of focusing on how Carmen is affected by her Uncle's decision that she will drop out of school, Paredes chooses to focus on the encumbrances plaguing Feliciano and Guálinto. The decision that will greatly affect Carmen's life is only evaluated as it affects and relates to the men in the family. As he ruminates on his nephew's future and his late brother's [Gumersindo] lasting influence on this future, Feliciano reveals his sense of remorse.

The narration reads “Gumersindo had confidently declared that his son would be a great man. And he had put on Feliciano a burden of guilt and responsibility, to see that the son would fulfill his destiny” (Paredes 155). When Gumersindo died, the role of *patrón* in the *Gómez familia* became vacant, and Feliciano was expected to assume responsibility for all duties and obligations that were left behind. That Paredes refers to such obligations as a “burden” suggests that the role of *patrón* is emotionally and physically taxing, allowing this moment to serve as an example of the demanding nature of Chicano patriarchy. Moreover, the suggestion that Feliciano would feel “guilt” should he not fulfill his brother’s wishes, indicates that Feliciano would feel he was committing an offense—going against the rules established by his culture. While Kaup would read this moment as Paredes’s affirmation of traditional Mexican authority, I argue that this interpretation overlooks the harsh, unfavorable realities of such authority that Paredes also highlights.

While the limited omniscient narration of *George Washington Gómez* is male-centered and primarily provides insight into the difficulties associated with being the sole provider and protector of *una familia*, the omniscient narration of *Caballero* gives readers access to both male and female perspectives, thus offering a wider scope of cultural critique. Though *Caballero* similarly challenges the glorification of *machismo*, the novel also explicitly challenges this glorification through the female perspective. We must consider what realms of sociopolitical thought *Caballero*’s gender-inclusive narration calls upon as it relates to and differs from *George Washington Gómez*’s male-dominant narration and how these representations affect our understanding of the history of the period. In *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, Susan Stanford Friedman identifies gynocriticism as “the historical study of women writers as a distinct literary tradition” (Friedman 18). She argues that “for gynocriticism,

the existence of patriarchy, however changing and historically inflected, serves as the founding justification for treating women writers of different times and places as part of a common tradition based on gender” (Friedman 18). The existence of patriarchy, Friedman argues, serves as the unifying ground between female writers from all backgrounds. This definition of “identity in terms of gender,” however, can create “other forms of oppression by rendering them invisible” (Friedman 21). Understanding women’s texts as a product of their gender alone can overlook other important factors such as race, ethnicity, and class (Friedman 23). Friedman argues for a “new geography of identity” that “insists that we think about women writers in relation to a fluid matrix instead of a fixed binary of male/female or masculine/feminine” (Friedman 26). The fluid matrix that Friedman imagines considers gender as one of many factors influencing women’s writing, leaving room for other factors like historical period, racial identity, religious affiliation and national origin.

Friedman’s analysis of the reception of women’s writing coupled with Puckett’s discussion of narrative style as having historical implications makes *Caballero*’s authorship and narrative style appear pointedly important. Before entering into a conversation regarding the narrative style of *Caballero*, however, it is necessary to consider the fact that the novel was written by not one but two women—Jovita González, a Chicana, and Eve Raleigh, an Anglo-American. María Cotera argues that many critical interpretations of *Caballero* do “not take into account the fact that the text itself represents...a collaboration” (*Native Speakers* 217). Reading the novel as the product of one author, she suggests, leads to a too simple understanding of the text as serving “an ‘assimilationist’ political agenda” (*Native Speakers* 216). The assimilationist political agenda Cotera refers to is one that promotes the neglect of Chican@ identity and an effort to conform to dominant Anglo sociopolitical ideals. If we read Cotera’s analysis of

existing interpretations of *Caballero*'s narrative style in conversation with Puckett and Friedman, we understand that Cotera believes homogenizing¹³ the authorship of the novel also oversimplifies the historical and political complexities present in González and Raleigh's text. Similar to a recognition that Paredes draws attention to the pitfalls of *machismo* to complicate *George Washington Gómez*'s representation of traditional Mexican authority, an awareness that *Caballero* was co-authored by women of differing backgrounds complicates the categorization of the novel as simply either a celebration or critique of Chican@ culture.

Cotera offers Holly Laird's theory of collaboration as "a useful entry point for rethinking" collaborative writing projects such as *Caballero*, "especially since her study focuses on the ways in which [such] projects often signify a desire to undo the binary logic that divides self from other" (*Native Speakers* 217). Laird's theory places *Caballero* not only in the position of attempting to unravel the binary logic of Mexican-American identity, but also the exclusionary logic that omits women from the conversation around Mexican-American identity. Cotera suggests that "the idea of dialogue, or at the very least a dialogic perspective on history, culture, and race relations" might be "the ultimate agenda at the heart of *Caballero* as a collaborative political, historical, and literary project" (*Native Speakers* 204). The novel, when considered as a dialogic narrative, becomes capable of communicating the ideas of not one identity, but several, as it combines thoughts and narration of not only men, but women, and not only Mexicans, but also Americans. The narration of *Caballero* thus becomes a conversation not only between inner and outer versions of "self" but also between two females and thus two

¹³ Cotera refers to oversimplifying the authorship of the novel (i.e. ignoring that the text is a collaborative project). I respond to Friedman and add that oversimplifying the novel can also be a product of focusing too heavily on gender. While González and Raleigh are both female, they are also defined by other factors, their life experiences, their national origin, their religious beliefs.

cultures—one Mexican, one American—attempting to construct a picture of history that is plural and inclusive rather than singular and exclusionary.

Cotera's discussion of *Caballero* and its narrative style as a dialogic project invokes Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel" and his discussion of heteroglossia. Bakhtin argues that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types, (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin 262). While Bakhtin argues that multiplicity of speech types is inherently present in all novels, I argue that the co-authorship of *Caballero* represents a literal embodiment of this idea. González and Raleigh's prose represents a convergence of two cultures, their novel, a physical encounter between two social speech types. Bakhtin suggests,

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters, are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorecie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (Bakhtin 263)

If we employ Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia to refine our understanding of González and Raleigh's narration of *Caballero* the text gains authority as a complicated representation of the encounter between two overlapping cultures, capable of engaging with characters and perspectives from both sides of such contact. Each utterance, each choice the authors make becomes socially significant, embedded in a lasting cultural conflict that characterizes the Chican@ experience. This contact, however, becomes problematic when certain subjects are left out of the conversation. While the novel represents a coming together of two cultures and thus two social speech types, it omits the voices of certain racially complex characters that complicate

the established binary.¹⁴ While Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia embeds the narrative choices the authors make in a social context, one cannot assume that all subjects important to the novel's story are inherently present. Bakhtin's analysis of "authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters," however, does highlight the importance of each utterance as well as the of the co-authorship of the novel (Bakhtin 263).

Perhaps one of the most socially significant characters in *Caballero* is Don Santiago, the *patrón* utterly unwilling to compromise and determined to sustain his role as master of his *hacienda*. Despite his children, sister, and wife's many appeals, Don Santiago refuses to accept the fact that his world is changing, that his children decide to pursue relationships with American men, that his sister decides to remarry, and that his wife supports these decisions. Don Santiago's refusal to attempt to negotiate two identities, results in his solitary death. The narration reads,

Dying in the aloneness that he made, he lay on his back, arms outstretched, where Death had gently eased him from where he had been standing on the bluff. A smile lifted the lips set so long in bitterness, and peace smoothed the stern lines of the aristocratic face.

(González and Raleigh 336)

That González and Raleigh describe Don Santiago's solitude as "aloneness that he made" suggests that they view his ultimate loneliness as a product of the choices that he made, a product of his undying adherence to Chicano patriarchal values that reinforce the superiority of men over women and discourage displays of emotion. Instead of qualifying his aloneness as tragic or unjust, González and Raleigh qualify it as an aloneness created out of stubbornness. This stubbornness is reflected in the "lips set so long in bitterness" as well as the "stern lines of the

¹⁴ My second chapter focuses on the way in which the established binary between Mexican and U.S. culture in *Caballero* omits certain racially complex, historically important subjects.

aristocratic face” (González 336). The emphasis the authors place on the bitter lips on the man’s face, only giving way to smiling at the character’s death, reinforces the idea that bitterness was an unproductive manner of living in a world of change. The “stern lines” reflected in Don Santiago’s “aristocratic face” similarly suggest an unproductive manner of living, but this time with specific reference to Don Santiago’s rigid adherence to regressive patriarchal ideals that reinforce the legitimacy and importance of traditional Mexican hierarchy. This moment, especially because it is the calculated product of two authors of differing descent, invokes a criticism of rigidity from not one but two cultures—both Mexican and U.S. American.

That this moment is narrated through the perspective of a white American soldier, Warrener, who marries Don Santiago’s favorite daughter, Susanita, is pointedly ironic. The man whom Don Santiago despises is “the one to close the lids over [his] eyes” (González and Raleigh 336). The man who, to Don Santiago, represents all that is evil in America, is the only person present at the *patrón*’s death. Staring at the corpse of the bitter man, Warrener wonders what Don Santiago felt on his last day of life, “Did he see the grandchildren, the guests, the activity, and the happiness that might have been?” or “had he held to the last to the staff of his traditions, speeding his soul with his head held high in the right of his convictions, to stand unafraid before the God whom he had worshipped, and, he believed, obeyed?” (González and Raleigh 336-337). Warrener’s ruminations echo the sentiments of readers as they attempt to understand the significance of Don Santiago’s isolated death. Did Don Santiago feel a sense of remorse, a longing for what could have been had he abandoned his principles? Or did he cling on to the fact that he had remained true to his principles, that he had enforced his culture’s political, social, and religious ideals, no matter the expense? Using Warrener’s character, an outsider to Don Santiago’s world, to narrate this moment allows it to function as an evaluation of Don Santiago’s

way of life from an American perspective. That Warrener ultimately qualifies Don Santiago's loneliness as self-induced is indicative of a broader cultural critique—one that criticizes the rigidity of *machismo*. Warrener recognizes that Don Santiago's stubborn adherence to patriarchal ideals leads to the loss of his family and his ultimate downfall.

Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, when applied to the conclusion of *Caballero*, allows Don Santiago's death, narrated by Warrener, to appear indicative of a conversation or dialogue (if a dialogue between dead and alive can be imagined) between a Mexican *patrón* and an American soldier and thus the values and customs of the societies that created these two men. Warrener's criticism of Don Santiago's stubbornness is suggestive of an American critique of the rigid patriarchal views of Chicanos. This idea is strengthened by the fact that the novel was influenced by an American author. The choice to have a white American character narrate this moment is important because it allows the scene to function as a cultural critique made by an outsider. In a changing world, the U.S. soldier seems able to attempt to understand and adapt while the elder Mexican seems unable to negotiate his identity in a developing world. Though perhaps counterintuitive, Don Santiago's silence or inability to respond or speak is also significant. The *patrón*'s silence seems to represent a concession of sorts, a confession that a too-stubborn way of life is ultimately ineffective in a modern world. González and Raleigh's choice to employ Warrener to narrate Don Santiago's death makes this moment culturally and socially significant.

Not unlike Don Santiago at the end of *Caballero*, Guálinto is isolated at the conclusion of *George Washington Gómez*. As Paredes's novel concludes, the reader leaves Guálinto, an outsider to his biological family and, though married to an Anglo woman, still largely isolated from the Anglo world. Guálinto's father hoped that his son would become a hero, a leader of his

people and enlisted Feliciano to ensure that this became true. Despite his father's dreams and his uncle's efforts to cultivate a heroic nephew, Guálinto ultimately abandons his family and his Mexican heritage and serves as a border security agent for the United States government. Guálinto fails to become the person his family hoped he'd be. In the final scene of the novel, Feliciano comments on this while talking with his nephew on his *rancho*,¹⁵

'The leader of his people,' Feliciano said.

'What do you mean?'

'That was what you were going to be, have you forgotten? The Prietos will be disappointed when they hear you've changed your mind.' (Paredes 300)

In Feliciano's eyes, Guálinto has abandoned his people and thus cannot serve as their leader. The Prietos, to whom Feliciano refers, are a Mexican family heading a political organization in Brownsville. Prior to this conversation, Guálinto refuses their invitation to join their organization, offering his new job and frequently shifting location as explanation for his refusal. Feliciano believes that joining the Prietos would allow Guálinto to fulfill his supposed destiny and become a leader of his people. Feliciano's dismissal of his nephew as a failure in this moment shows that the only kind of success Feliciano values is one that serves to advance and advocate for Mexican people. While Guálinto does achieve monetary success, his uncle refuses to recognize this as legitimate, consequently placing a strain on their relationship. Feliciano's narrow conception of success thus prevents him from maintaining a productive relationship with his nephew and leaves the two, once comrades, isolated in their newly separate worlds.

The conclusion of *George Washington Gómez* is narrated almost entirely through dialogue, the reader offered little insight into Guálinto and Uncle Feliciano's inner thoughts and

¹⁵ Ranch, farm

feelings. The obstructed access to each character's thoughts places the reader in the same position as a participant in the conversation—only privy to the spoken words each character chooses to share and certain body language offered in the narration, rather than privy to both chosen words and suppressed thoughts and emotions, as would come with traditional omniscient narration. Though an admittedly obvious connection, that the conclusion of the novel is a conversation between two very different examples of Chicano men attempting to survive in a changing world, invites a discussion of the scene's relation to Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia. This conversation, albeit literally, represents the interaction of two varying social speech types—Feliciano representing the old Chicano, the Chicano embedded in a culture that promotes hyper-masculinity and patriarchy, and Guálinto representing the new Chicano, the Chicano attempting to negotiate between two worlds and survive in an Anglo-dominated environment. To narrate this scene as a conversation thus allows the moment to serve as an active interaction between two different social perspectives. The limited narration also serves to dramatize the moment and paint the relationship between Feliciano and Guálinto as strained while simultaneously making the few moments of explanatory narration more significant. For example, the reader is made aware that Feliciano looks "shrewedly" at Guálinto, indicating a sharp judgment from uncle to nephew, confirming the idea that Feliciano condemns his nephew's choice to abandon his people and his hometown (Paredes 298). Following this shrewd look, Guálinto is described as fidgeting and looking "embarrassed," indicating a sense of shame as he faces his uncle and describes his new life (Paredes 298).

Despite these few instances of detail, the end of the novel is left largely ambiguous—the reader offered no tidy severance or joyous reunion between uncle and nephew. Because the narrative style employed in this concluding scene places the reader in the same position as a

participant in the conversation, this ambiguity also suggests that Guálinto and Feliciano are no longer capable of communicating effectively. The reader cannot be sure of either character's true feelings about the other in the same way that the characters are unable to have a productive, transparent conversation with one another. The characters' inability to effectively communicate is reinforced by the moments of explanatory narration in which both characters are described as "silent" (Paredes 301). Uncle Feliciano remarks that Guálinto was "'ashamed of [his] house, even when [he] was in high school'" (Paredes 301). Rather than denying the allegation or offering an explanation, Guálinto is described as silent, indicating that he is practicing restraint and even suggesting a confession of sorts. As the conversation continues, Feliciano asks his nephew if his children will learn Spanish. Guálinto responds, "'There's no reason for them to do so. They will grow up far away from here'" (Paredes 301). Upon hearing this, Feliciano is rendered speechless, consequently allowing his nephew to steer the conversation in a different direction. Though Feliciano values Spanish and has ensured that his nieces and nephews speak the language fluently, he does not advocate for its importance or explicitly criticize his nephew, he remains silent, again indicating that he is holding back, no longer willing or able to communicate with his nephew.

Feliciano and Guálinto's inability to communicate indicates a problem with Chicano patriarchy that necessitates a strict adherence to traditional Mexican principles—hierarchical familial roles, male dominance, encouragement of religious and cultural tradition (to name a few). In a culture that claims to value *la familia* over everything, the deterioration of the relationship between uncle and nephew appears significant. Guálinto, expected to follow in his father and uncle's footsteps, is unable to satisfy their expectations and is ultimately dismissed as a disgrace. Despite Guálinto's monetary success and relative happiness with his Anglo wife,

Feliciano is unwilling to commend or congratulate him. As Sandra Soto suggests, through Guálinto's failure and, I add, the deterioration of Guálinto and Feliciano's relationship, Paredes invites his readers to understand the "incredibly narrow definition of leadership and mastery" constructed by this patriarchal Chican@ culture (Soto 120). While Soto suggests this is in effort to unmask the marginalization of women in Chican@ culture, I suggest that Paredes's choice to depict Guálinto's failure critiques Chican@ culture that enforces patriarchy. Paredes's critique, however, is largely limited to the male Chicano experience, rather than the great injustices experienced by Chicana women.

While Paredes's failure to explicitly criticize the marginalization of women might seem to render *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* incapable of occupying a similar resistant space, I argue that *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* similarly highlight the intense pressure placed on Chicano men and thus occupy a progressive space that criticizes Chican@ culture for upholding patriarchal tradition. My discussion of Paredes's narrative style that illuminates the harsh expectations placed on men helps to elucidate such illuminations in *Caballero*. While *Caballero* does explicitly address the marginalization of women, it does not place the blame for such marginalization on the individual man, but rather, the Chicano system that perpetuates hierarchical categorization. Reacting to his daughter's emotional response to his refusal to allow her to attend the town ball (as it is full of *Americanos*¹⁶), Don Santiago thinks,

Women! Why God ever made the creatures the way they were was beyond comprehension. Women with their loose reasonings, their...their...*por Lucifer*, what a man had to endure! He leaped into the saddles of the horse always ready for him at the

¹⁶ Americans, here specifically, American men

gate, and spurred the animal so violently it reared and pitched and tore away into the plains. (González and Raleigh 29)

As Don Santiago attempts to understand his daughter's emotional response, he asks why God created women "the way they were." Because this bit of narration is internal thought, the reader can see that Don Santiago, at the core, genuinely believes that women are fundamentally different than men. Here, Don Santiago places himself in the position of victim, thinking of the hardships he must "endure" as the result of (his vastly overgeneralized conception of) women's temperaments. Don Santiago not only fails to consider his own role in creating such an intense reaction from his daughter but also exhibits an emotional reaction himself, riding away "violently," tearing through the plains. The omniscient narration employed by González and Raleigh in this moment allows the reader insight into Don Santiago's internal thoughts, effectively highlighting the degree to which the masculinist beliefs of Chican@ culture have pervaded his mind.

As the section continues, the pervasiveness of Chican@ culture is further emphasized as Don Santiago is painted as well-intentioned, effectively absolving the man himself of responsibility for the deterioration of his relationship with his family and forcing the reader to consider instead the circumstances that might have brought him to such a fate. The narration reads, "Most of all, he liked to see his family happy. His heart was heavy when daily he saw Angela's tear-washed eyes, María Petronilla's silent reproach, Dolores's glumness, Susanita's unhappy small smile" (González and Raleigh 29). If Don Santiago's deepest joy is seeing his family happy, that he refuses to abandon his beliefs to make Angela's tears, his wife's silence, his sister's gloom, and Susanita's unhappy smile go away, reveals the degree to which he values *machismo* and his role as *patrón*. Furthermore, because his family's happiness is explicitly

addressed as something very important to him, the fact that he does not change his behavior as a result of this desire suggests that he views his own adherence to Chicano masculinist tendencies as a necessity rather than a choice.

González and Raleigh's criticism of the rigidity and pervasiveness of Chican@ culture is reinforced by their inclusion of explicit commentary from a variety of characters on the absurdities of the patriarchal system. When Don Santiago becomes enraged because his son, Luis, reveals that he is moving North to study art with an *Americano*, Don Santiago is shocked and immediately forbids his son from leaving Rancho Palma de Cristo.¹⁷ The omniscient narration enters into Luis' thoughts in the moment following Don Santiago's vehement reaction,

Luis Gonzaga instinctively cringed a little when rage twisted his father's face to fearsomeness. Only a little, for the wings had broken their prison and were already soaring free. He saw, clearly, that the real issue was not his consorting with an American, or even his leaving; the issue was a test of the mastership of his father over his family.

(González and Raleigh 197)

That Luis refers to his father's rage as a "prison" highlights the confining nature of Chicano patriarchy. He feels imprisoned under his father's high expectations and watchful eye. Luis gains strength to escape his father's prison through his passion for art and his relationship with an *Americano*, two interests that go against traditional Chicano *machismo* that encourages dissociation with emotion and promotion of Mexican culture. In qualifying Don Santiago's reaction as a result of his desire to maintain control over his family rather than as a logical response to a potentially unfavorable situation, González and Raleigh effectively criticize Don Santiago's motivation to prevent his son from travelling North. Luis claims that "the real issue

¹⁷ The Mendoza y Soría family's *hacienda*

was not his consorting with an American” suggesting that Don Santiago does not abhor Americans because of actual acts that have affected him personally but rather, out of principle. Luis suggests that Don Santiago feels Americans are a threat to his assured position as patriarch in his family. The omniscient narration enters Don Santiago’s thoughts as he responds to his son, finally “giving him permission” to leave the *rancho*, “If he could not dominate he must keep a pretense of it” (González and Raleigh 198). What matters to Don Santiago, it seems, is the social status that comes with being the *patrón* of *una familia*, the glory and sense of worth that comes with the perception of power. Because Don Santiago claims to value his family’s happiness over everything, that he would threaten this happiness by enforcing certain rules to maintain his sense of power, reveals the ultimate absurdity of his belief in *machismo* and Chican@ culture.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have highlighted the ways in which *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez* similarly present resistance to traditional Chican@ patriarchal ideals in order to suggest that framing the two texts as complementary rather than oppositional allows readers to identify the complexities present in both texts. While both *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* are not conventional Chican@ texts, each novel presents an account of the coming together of two worlds—Mexican and American—while performing a critique of Chicano patriarchy. Neither text is purely assimilationist or resistant, both exploring a space of negotiation and presenting a unique picture of a historical period in the same land. While *George Washington Gómez* is oftentimes criticized for its negation of the Chicana experience, I argue that Paredes’s failure to explicitly address the plight of Chicana women exposes the pressures associated with being the *patrón* of *una familia*. In this way, Paredes’s lack of attention to women and the male-dominated narration that he employs becomes more than just an oversight—it becomes culturally significant. Rather than diminishing the text’s value, I argue

that this narrative choice serves to enhance the text's function as a progressive, resistant Chican@ novel.

Caballero, I argue, similarly functions as a progressive, resistant Chican@ novel; however, while the text does highlight the intense expectations placed on the male patriarch, it also explicitly addresses the injustices and disadvantages of the Chicana experience through female narration, extending the function of the social and political voices present in the text beyond exposing the hardships associated with being the *patrón* into the revelation of the gendered inequity occasioned by Chican@ adherence to *machismo*. *Caballero*'s narration not only includes the perspectives of both males and females, but also of both Americans and Mexicans, thus further expanding the text beyond a feminist exposé into a cultural conversation brought about by the collision and collaboration of one Mexican and one Anglo-American author. The text's authorship allows the novel to function as a literal embodiment of Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia—each narrative choice socially and culturally significant.

González and Raleigh's inclusion of the perspective of an American soldier complicates the traditional Chican@ conception of *Americanos* as purely bad and ill-intentioned and calls for a cross-cultural, empathetic understanding. When Susanita falls in love with an American soldier, Warrener, he travels to her *hacienda* in attempt to gain the respect of her family. Speaking with Susanita's mother, Doña María Petronilla, Warrener explains his living situation, and María is surprised to find that the soldier lives indoors year-round. His description of these homes is followed by an interjection in parentheses, "(Do I make it clear, mother of Susanita? Do you see that we have gentle ways of living also, and that she will be a queen in the setting I will build specifically for her, whether it be here in your land or in my own—do you see?)" (González & Raleigh 227-228). This parenthetical interjection allows the reader insight into the

internal thoughts of the American soldier; however, that Warrener's most heartfelt appeal to Susanita's mother is parenthetical and ultimately unvoiced indicates a cultural barrier that prevents the pair's transparent communication. Warrener's parenthetical plea is reminiscent of a Mexican *patrón's* macho manifesto—a promise to protect and care for the woman of his household. Thus, represented in Warrener's parenthetical is an attempt, by an American, to empathize with and assimilate into Susanita's *macho* culture. While his lengthy description of the home in which he will house Susanita could be seen as materialistic and even boastful, the parenthetical questioning allows the reader to see that Warrener's intentions are genuine and motivated not by a desire to brag, but rather by a desire to earn the affection of the mother of the woman he loves by attempting to understand and act in line with Susanita and her mother's cultural values.

María's acceptance of Warrener's declaration of his love and desire to care for Susanita serves to highlight the capacity for empathy María embodies and challenges the conception of Mexican identity as rigid and unchanging. The complex narrative style of *Caballero* which includes rhetorical fragments and multiple perspectives of both men and women, Mexicans and Americans, allows the text to embody a progressive cross-cultural understanding. Later in conversation with Warrener, María responds to his claim that the American style of living is not much different than that of Mexicans with the phrase, "I see, Señor Warrener," followed by the parenthetical insertion, "(I see also what you have been trying to tell me, and I believe you have told the truth. I see that you love her very much and I am afraid, so afraid for both of you)" (González and Raleigh 228). While outwardly, María is standoffish and unresponsive to Warrener's protestations, this parenthetical interjection allows us to understand that María's hesitancy comes from a place of genuine love and fear, rather than a vehement contempt for the

American people. María not only accepts Warrener's claim as true and good-natured, but also expresses hope for the relationship. Despite the fact that Susanita and Warrener come from different backgrounds, María is willing to accept their love as genuine and look past their surface differences. This narrative choice allows the novel to construct a sympathetic relationship between Mexicans and *Americanos* that challenges the traditional Chican@ idea that constructed the two cultures as diametrically opposed.

Because the novel itself is a collaboration between a Mexican and an American, the scene between María and Warrener is indicative of a larger effort by González and Raleigh to ignite a conversation between Mexicans and Americans, a conversation in which the participants, though from greatly differing backgrounds, attempt to understand the opposing point of view. As Warrener professes his love for Susanita, he verbally expresses only part of what he wishes to communicate, the other part expressed through the parenthetical interjection. Warrener's largely objective description of the physical housing that he will provide for Susanita is followed by a more emotional, personal expression of his desire to show the gentleness of American people and the authenticity of his love for Susanita. The parenthetical interjection also includes that Susanita will be treated as a "queen" in her new setting, an essentially *macho* sentiment (González and Raleigh 227). Without the parenthetical interjection, the reader understands the soldier's plea but not its role as part of a larger conversation attempting to negotiate a potential bicultural future. María's voiced response to Warrener is seemingly unremarkable; yet, the interjection that follows reveals the anxiety she harbors. Though she believes Warrener is genuine in his declaration of his love for Susanita, she also recognizes that the couple's life together will be difficult as they will be judged by both sides of a long-standing conflict. Warrener and Susanita's union represents more than just a set of unlikely lovers; it represents the

coming together of two cultures. María's parenthetical rumination both reinforces the pair's decision while acknowledging the reality of its implications.

The imagining of a harmonious union between *Americanos* and Chican@s in González and Raleigh's *Caballero* was a progressive conceptualization of opposing cultures represented in a time of conflict between the two cultures. Beyond revealing the suffocating nature of *machismo* and the potential goodness in both Mexicans and Americans, González and Raleigh also resist traditional Chican@ ideals through the vehicle of defiant female characters. Don Santiago's sister, Doña Dolores, embodies the most pronounced resistance to his oppressive patriarchal *autoridad*. Doña Dolores, a widow living at Rancho Palma de Cristo, is unafraid of her brother and is often the only character who will speak her mind. When Don Santiago and Doña Dolores get into a quarrel about whether they will attend All Souls Day, Doña Dolores passionately reacts to her brother's declaration that they will not attend,

‘Command all you wish, I shall not obey. I do not cringe before you as your wife does, I shall not blindly do your wish as does Angela, I shall refuse the abuse you heap upon Luis Gonzaga. I am a Mendoza and a Soría also and worthy of the name if you are not, and though a woman, I know my duty!’ (González and Raleigh 26)

Doña Dolores challenges Don Santiago's role as authoritarian as she exclaims that she will not obey her brother's commands and that she is not fearful of her brother's wrath in the same way that his wife and children are. She claims a position of authority as she suggests she is just as worthy of representing the family as Don Santiago is—an uncommon notion for a Chicana woman. As a woman in the Mendoza y Soría family, she believes she has a duty to uphold; just as a man has a sense of familial obligation, so does she. Doña Dolores, in this moment,

challenges the traditional Chican@ idea that the man should occupy the sole position of power in *una familia*. Doña Dolores thus embodies a feminist critique of Chicano patriarchy.

As Doña Dolores explicitly resists Don Santiago's dominance, his children are provided with an example of a headstrong woman, unashamed of her gender and willing to challenge what she sees as unjust. As the novel progresses, the children are influenced by Doña Dolores's presence and gain strength to resist their father's wishes. When talking with her sister, Angela, Susanita ponders,

Do you know, Angela, I often wonder if there isn't a part of us that is completely ours given to us at birth which cannot possibly belong to anyone else. How can we completely belong to papá, if we have separate souls? *Tía*¹⁸ is so strongly herself is the reason why she—oh I don't know how to say it. (González and Raleigh 212)

Though she is not as outward and explicit in her challenging of her father's authority, in this private conversation, Susanita takes issue with her father's dominance. Susanita believes that she has control over at least some aspect of herself as she has a separate soul from her father. She seems to recognize that her gender does not automatically render her unimportant. Because *Tía* Dolores is "so strongly herself" that she can present resistance to Don Santiago, Susanita believes that this might be possible for her too.

While Doña Dolores is an experienced, widowed Chicana woman both willing and able to openly and ardently criticize her brother for his oppression of his family, Susanita is an inexperienced, love-stricken teenager beginning to realize the injustices of her surrounding world. Doña Dolores embodies a harsh critique of the subjection and marginalization of women by Chicano men. She is a strong, self-assured woman who repeatedly voices her resistance to her

¹⁸ Aunt (my footnote)

brother's dominance. Susanita, throughout the course of the novel, gains the strength to defy her father's wishes, perhaps representing a new generation of Chicana women following in Doña Dolores's footsteps. Through these defiant female characters, González and Raleigh explicitly address the unfavorable plight of Chicana women and criticize the actions of Chicano men that subordinate their female counterparts. The novel critiques a longstanding Chicano tradition that emphasizes the importance of strength, hyper-masculinity, piety, and leadership.

Through characters like Doña Dolores, Susanita, and Luis, González and Raleigh present resistance to the authority of Chicano patriarchy and *machismo* and imagine a new generation of Chican@s that embody a collaborative conceptualization of Mexican-American identity. González and Raleigh's style of omniscient narration that includes direct perspectives from males and females and Mexicans and Americans allows the novel to function as a conversation not only between genders, but also between cultures. *Caballero*, in its inclusion of multiple perspectives and as the collaborative work of two authors, is the literal embodiment of Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia—each utterance, each narrative choice, socially and culturally significant. Though not through the vehicle of defiant female characters or the inclusion of the perspectives of both Mexicans and Americans, *George Washington Gómez*, too, embodies an important critique of the rigid ideals that characterize Chican@ culture. Paredes's male-dominant narration draws attention to and exposes the pressures associated with being the *patrón* of *una familia*. While *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero* are typically framed as oppositional—one a feminist narrative, the other an affirmation of male authority—the two texts, when framed as complementary, illuminate interesting complexities in one another as the pronounced feminist resistance in *Caballero* highlights the similarly resistant attitudes present in *George Washington Gómez*.

**Chapter Two:
Racial Complexity and Binational Collaboration**

*This land was Mexican once,
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again.*
-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (3)

While Chican@ identity is often construed in binary terms, part Mexican and part U.S. American, Chicana theorists and critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández call attention to the role Native identity has played and continues to play in the lives of many Chicanas. In the poem cited in this chapter's epigraph, Anzaldúa refers to the Mexican borderland as "Mexican once" and "Indian always," thus suggesting that the land was, first and foremost, occupied by people of Indian descent (Anzaldúa 3).¹⁹ In *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa contextualizes the history of the borderland area, calling specific attention to the Indian presence during the "original peopling of the Americas" (Anzaldúa 4). Anzaldúa argues that negative conceptions of Indigenous Chican@ identity, embodied in the symbol of *La Malinche*, have occasioned an oppressive culture in which Indian identity is marginalized or ignored. Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, in *Unspeaking Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries*, argues that Jovita González, in *Caballero*, exhibits such oppressive tendencies—failing to adequately represent the influence of all three cultures. Guidotti-Hernández believes that González's texts erase "Indians and blacks as historical subjects in the making of South Texas" (Guidotti-Hernández 139).

¹⁹ I chose to use the term "Indian" because it is the term that appears in *George Washington Gómez* and *Caballero*. I use the term to signify the indigenous peoples of the South Texas borderland area. I use Indigenous and Native interchangeably, again to refer to the indigenous peoples of the South Texas borderland area.

In this chapter, I argue that *Caballero*, a binationally collaborative work, relies on racial binaries to define the Chican@ experience, exhibiting certain racist tendencies in its portrayal of Indians and *peons*.²⁰ Indian identity is presented as entirely distinct from Mexican identity and certain characters exhibit racist tendencies that portray *peons* as intellectually and inherently inferior to their *hidalgo*²¹ counterparts. In this portrayal, however, González and Raleigh construct a future in which Mexican-American collaboration, racial inclusion, and social mobility are possible. *George Washington Gómez*, on the other hand, largely represents instances in which these modes of collaboration are impossible due to the structure of U.S. racialization. Through Guálinto's ultimate betrayal of his Mexican people, Paredes presents Mexican and U.S. cultures as oppositional and mutually exclusive. While Paredes's representation of the collision of Mexican and U.S. identities remains binary, his novel is pluralist in its portrayal of Mexican racial identity as he gives specific attention to both the African American and Native Mexican experience. Paredes constructs a history of the South Texas borderland that includes Indians and African Americans as active subjects. González and Raleigh largely marginalize these racial identities while constructing an inclusive future in which binational collaboration and upward social mobility are possible.

Caballero is a work of historical fiction through which González and Raleigh attempt to imagine the realized future²² in the past. Gonzalez and Raleigh's text was written in the 1930s and 40s and represents the 1846-1848 period of Mexican-American history. Throughout

²⁰ The *peon* system was a system in which a person, usually of Indian or *mestizo* (mixed-race, usually the offspring of a Spaniard and an American Indian) descent was indebted to a *hacienda*. In order to resolve this debt, the *peon* would dedicate a life of service to the *hidalgo* (gentleman) and his family, usually completing manual labor of some sort (De Iturbide 427).

²¹ A Mexican gentleman, part of an aristocratic elite who considered themselves above *mestizos* and Indians

²² The realized future meaning their experience of the present (in this case the 1930s and 40s)

Caballero, the authors construct a narrative that imagines a space of collaboration between Mexicans and U.S. Americans. The story the authors tell of the history of the borderland is inevitably influenced by the world they find themselves living in at the time of writing. Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* was written in the same time period as *Caballero*, however it represents the borderland area in the 1930s and 40s. Paredes's novel constructs a picture of the contemporary borderland as Paredes experienced it. The different time periods of the two novels has consequences for their takes on both race and gender—Paredes highlighting the injustices of Mexican patriarchy and the impossibility of a full co-existence between Mexicans and Americans while deemphasizing the Chicana experience, González and Raleigh focusing on the possibility of a collaborative future and the injustices plaguing Chicanas while omitting certain racial nuances and historical subjects.

Caballero, as a collaborative text, opens a narrative space of cross-cultural empathy that envisions a collaborative future between Mexican and U.S. communities. As Guidotti-Hernández highlights, Jovita González herself

argues that her generation of Texas-Mexicans 'bring with them the broader view, a clearer understanding of the good and bad qualities of both races. They are the converging element of two antagonistic civilizations; they have the blood of one and have acquired the ideas of the other.'²³ (Guidotti-Hernández 169)

²³This quote originally appears in Jovita González's "Social Life in Cameron, Starr and Zapata Counties" that details the historical background of the Río Grande Valley area and discusses social and economic life before the development of the Río Grande area and the effect on border politics. This particular quote comes from a chapter entitled "What the Coming of the Americans has meant to the Border People." The chapter discusses social and cultural differences between Mexicans and Americans as it relates to the convergence of two inherently opposed civilizations. González points out a distinction between the older and younger generation of Mexicans. The older generation holds fast to traditional ideals and does not want their children to consort with Americans. The younger generation is willing to attend American schools, learn English, and,

González's "broader view" is from a vantage point that recognizes the possibilities of the coming together of two diametrically opposed cultures. Rather than participate in a cultural politics that necessitates a hegemonic dichotomy characterized by U.S. dominance, *Caballero* imagines a new way forward—a convergence of "two antagonistic civilizations" (González 113). While this future represents a progressive synthesis, it also engages in a rhetoric of identity based on difference. Susan Stanford Friedman, in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, calls for a new "geographic discourse" of identity that moves away from a relational construction of identity as based on "difference from the other" and towards a formation of identity based on "spaces of dynamic encounter" (Friedman 19). In these spaces of dynamic encounter, "the relational discourse of positionality stresses the constantly shifting nature of identity as it is constituted through different points of reference and material conditions of history" (Friedman 23). Friedman's conceptualization of identity is fluid and influenced by context—different aspects emphasized in different settings.

While *Caballero* does imagine a space of dynamic encounter between Mexicans and U.S. Americans, it also reproduces a racial binary. In establishing the convergence of "two antagonistic civilizations," the Mexican experience is homogenized (González 113). Guidotti-Hernández takes issues with this aspect of González's representation of her new generation of Texas-Mexicans. She argues that González "says little or nothing about Afro-mestizos, African Americans, or American Indians or about the specific place of women in this convergence" (Guidotti-Hernández 169). While González and Raleigh's novel includes female voices in its collaborative representation of the Chican@ experience, its portrayal homogenizes a more

González hopes, advocate for a better future for their people. González believes that she understands this new generation of Mexicans and suggests that they might bring an end to "racial feuds" in the borderlands (González 113).

diverse history. Friedman highlights the tendency of feminist discourse to create “an alliance of women everywhere based in the commonality of women and in opposition to the patriarchal societies within which women live” (Friedman 41). This emphasis on the commonality of the female experience, she argues, “denies the structural process of ‘othering’ by a host of other factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, national origin, and age” (Friedman 41). While *Caballero* does explicitly acknowledge the patriarchal tendencies and consequent injustices characteristic of Chican@ culture while forging a collaborative cross-cultural future between Mexicans and Americans, other factors, like the influence of race and class on the Chican@ experience, are left largely deemphasized. In emphasizing the specifically female Chicana experience while imagining a bicultural future, González and Raleigh inadvertently reinforce a cultural and racial binary.

Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez*, on the other hand, presents a relational, multifaceted, multiracial representation of Chican@ identity. In this nuanced portrayal, however, Paredes leaves the injustices of the Chicana experience largely deemphasized and suggests binational collaboration is impossible. Paredes emphasizes the pressures and expectations placed on Chicano masculinity fostered by the concept of *machismo* and the conflict between Mexican and U.S. communities. Through the vehicle of multiracial characters such as *La India* and *El Negro*, Paredes demands recognition of Native and African American identity as part of the Chican@ experience. In his article, “Border Literary Histories, Globalization, and Critical Regionalism,” Chicano critic José Limón calls for a more regionalized approach to understanding Chican@ literature—one that pays attention to “the specificities of the local sites and texts, and the varying complexity of their interaction of the global,” rather than “hurriedly globalizing” a “complex regional experience” (“Border Literary Histories” 164). Limón’s call to

nuance the Chican@ experience echoes Friedman's call to conceptualize identity as a product of "spaces of dynamic encounter" that consider "different points of reference and material conditions of history" (Friedman 19, 23). While neither Limón nor Friedman explicitly address the ways in which hurriedly globalizing or over-emphasizing binaries ignores the role of Indian culture in forming Chican@ identities, these critiques provide a useful lens through which Chican@ texts that represent binarized Chican@ identity become problematic.

I argue that Paredes's racially pluralist representation of the Chican@ experience is a nuanced approach in line with Limón's desire for attention to regional complexities that acknowledges the materiality of history Friedman posits. Paredes answers the call to regionally nuance the borderland experience, in part, through his portrayal of the Indian Chicana experience, embodied in the character of *La India*. *La India*, a classmate of Guálinto's, is said to have been given the nickname "due to her close resemblance to the Indian pictured on the Red Indian pencil tablets, down to the long black braids" (Paredes 121). *La India*, even in her physical appearance, represents a stereotypical conception of Indian Chicana identity. *La India* is quickly established as a provocative, mischievous student, giggling and making dirty jokes about their Anglo teacher, Miss Cornelia, while she is out of the room. *La India* makes false claims about Guálinto's interest in herself and another classmate and causes Guálinto to cry. When Miss Cornelia reenters the classroom, she interrogates Guálinto and asks if it was El Colorado, a big, intimidating Chicano boy. Confused and nervous, Guálinto shakes his head, affirming Miss Cornelia's wrongful suspicion. When Guálinto apologizes to El Colorado for this mishap, El Colorado responds, "'It was La India's fault, the dirty bitch'" (Paredes 124).

While this scene may seem a simple instance of grade school bullying, Gloria Anzaldúa's discussion of *La Malinche* highlights the importance of Paredes's choice to portray Guálinto's

bully as of Indian descent in a historical and cultural context. *La Malinche*²⁴ was an indigenous woman from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico who served as a guide, interpreter, and counselor to Cortés during his conquest of Mexico. Beyond these practical functions, *La Malinche* was also Cortés's mistress. Because she maintained a sexual relationship with a Spanish conquistador, *La Malinche* was a controversial figure in the eyes of her fellow Mexicans. Today, *La Malinche*, as a symbol and icon, maintains this controversial position. Some consider her a traitor—one who abandoned her people to work with their conquerors. Others consider her an eternal victim—an innocent Indian woman exploited by a violent man. Still others consider her the icon of Mexican-American motherhood. Regardless of the interpretation of *La Malinche* one chooses to accept, it is indisputable that the indigenous woman occupies a highly-contested space and quite often, a negative one. El Colorado's characterization of *La India* as a "bitch" and "dirty" is not unlike the traditional characterization of *La Malinche* as a traitor, as *la chingada* (Paredes 124).²⁵ Though Paredes does not explicitly critique the negative conceptualization of *La India* by her classmates, the crass language he uses to describe *La India* demands a reaction from his readers. While a character of different descent might just as easily serve as Guálinto's bully, that Paredes chooses *La India* forces the reader to consider the racial implications of such a character—the reader cannot simply ignore the role Indian heritage plays in Chican@ identity.

While Paredes does include a racially nuanced Chican@ experience via the character of *La India*, Anzaldúa might take issue with the largely negative space that *La India* occupies. *La India* is, in the simplest terms, a troublemaker. She is dismissed by her classmates as an instigator of conflict. Anzaldúa acknowledges the controversial space *La Malinche* occupies, but

²⁴ *La Malinche* and Hernán Cortés's son, Martín Cortés, was thought to be the first *mestizo*.

²⁵ Literally meaning "the fucked one," a colloquial term referencing *La Malinche*

rather than focusing on the way in which *La Malinche* betrayed her people by consorting with Cortés, Anzaldúa focuses on the way in which the Mexican people betrayed *La Malinche*. She writes,

Not me sold out my people but they me. Because of the color of my skin they betrayed me. The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged...For 300 years, she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people...For 300 years, she was invisible, she was not heard. (Anzaldúa 22)

Anzaldúa argues that the Indian Chicana woman has suffered for centuries because she is thought of as a traitor. Chicana women, she believes, are repeatedly forced to ignore the Indian aspect of their identity because it is controversial. This has led many Chicana authors to ignore the role that Indian culture plays in Chicana life in their writings. Anzaldúa demands a reclamation, “What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, and Indian” (Anzaldúa 22). Paredes represents all three cultures in *George Washington Gómez*, however, the Indian girl that Paredes depicts is a traitor who sells her classmates out to their Anglo teacher—a traitor seemingly reminiscent of her predecessor, *La Malinche*. Through the character of *La India*, Paredes confronts the reality of Indian Chicana identity and acknowledges the influence of Indians in Chicana history. Paredes thus suggests that the negative conceptualization of female Indian identity is still prevalent in the 1930s and 40s and highlights the fact that Chicanas were not only persecuted by Americans but also by their male Chicana counterparts.

Paredes’s negative portrayal of *La India* presents a contrast to his relatively positive depiction of Guálinto’s identification with his Indian identity. Throughout the novel, Guálinto’s ethnically ambiguous name allows him to choose which racial identity he would like to associate himself with; Guálinto is allowed different opportunities with each different ethnic association.

When Feliciano brings Guálinto to enroll in classes at the local school, Miss Cornelia inquires, ““Strange name, isn’t it? Is it an Indian name?”” to which Feliciano replies, “Yes...it’s an Indian name”” (Paredes 110). Feliciano’s response to Miss Cornelia’s question affirms Guálinto’s association with the Indian side of his identity. Feliciano chooses not to explain the true origin of Guálinto’s name—Guálinto a nickname for his American given name, George—and allows Miss Cornelia to assume the name is of Indian origin. In this moment, the Indian aspect of Guálinto’s Chicano identity is not only acknowledged but promoted. Feliciano seems to affirm Miss Cornelia’s question because he believes it is the answer she wants to hear. As the scene ends, Guálinto reflects on the meeting with Miss Cornelia, “He was so pleased with himself that he forgot to ask his uncle why he had said that Guálinto was an Indian name” (Paredes 111). Here, it seems that Feliciano’s response to Miss Cornelia was not typical, but given for specific reason. Guálinto’s wondering why his uncle would have said such a thing not only serves to make Feliciano’s answer seem important, but also highlights the racial complexity of Guálinto as a Chicano character.

Guálinto’s Indian identity, portrayed through his ethnically ambiguous name, is again construed as a positive when Guálinto, at eight years old, reflects on his growing understanding of the two cultures he is straddled between. The narration reads, “Consciously, he considered himself a Mexican. He was ashamed of the name his dead father had given him, George Washington Gómez. He was grateful to his Uncle Feliciano for having registered him in school as ‘Guálinto’ and having said that it was an Indian name” (Paredes 147). Guálinto harbors shame regarding his Mexican identity, sometimes wishing that he could “be a full-fledged, complete American without the shameful encumberment of his Mexican race” (Paredes 148). As evidenced by the use of the word “encumberment,” Guálinto conceptualizes his Mexican identity

as a hindrance, something holding him back. He is “grateful” that Feliciano registered him as Guálinto, for it allows him to escape, or at least imagine an escape, from this Mexican side of himself. Guálinto also says he is ashamed of the name his father gave him—George Washington Gómez, meant to mimic the first U.S. president, George Washington. The idea that Guálinto is an Indian name again allows Guálinto to escape an identity given to him at birth. Though his parents gave him the name in hopes that he would become a great man, Guálinto is embarrassed by their attempt to award him an American name and welcomes the opportunity to have his name otherwise categorized. The categorization of Guálinto as an Indian name allows him to escape the supposedly humiliating reality of his name—a name that reflects Mexican aspirations towards U.S. greatness.

While Paredes’s portrayal of Indian Chican@ identity is complicated and perhaps contradictory, as it functions differently for male and female characters, the very fact that he includes such explicit examples of the Indian influence on Mexican-American identity is notable. *La India*, especially when considered in the context of Anzaldúa’s discussion of *La Malinche*, seems representative of the historical marginalization of Indian Chicana women by Chican@ culture. Though Anzaldúa might insist that Paredes extend his portrayal of *La India* to include a pronounced critique of such degradation of the Indian Chicana, I argue that Paredes’s acknowledgment of the racial complexity of Chicana identity is progressive, even if preliminary. As José Limón calls for a more regionalized approach to understanding Chican@ identity, I argue Paredes’s racially complex portrayal of Guálinto’s conception of self allows for a more nuanced understanding of a variety of Chican@ experiences, rather than just one homogenized, “hurriedly globalized” Chican@ experience (“Border Literary Histories” 164). Through the characters of *La India* and *El Negro*, as well as Guálinto’s ethnically ambiguous name, Paredes

acknowledges and explores the racial and ethnic complexity of Chican@s throughout *George Washington Gómez*, thus giving the lie to a binary, exclusionary conceptualization of Chican@ identity.

Paredes calls attention to the unjust persecution associated with the experience of being a mixed-race Chicano through his portrayal of the character *El Negro*. In the first scene of the novel, Texas Rangers halt a buggy pulling two Mexican men. Paredes writes, “The driver was sitting on the right, and even at that distance they could see that his face was a very dark brown” (Paredes 9). Here, the “very dark brown” face is suggested as reason for the Rangers’ decision to stop the buggy. As the section continues, *El Negro* is further described as having “Negroid features” (Paredes 10). Paredes calls attention to an African American influenced Chicano heritage almost immediately, highlighting the complex ethnic composition of Chican@s. In the very first pages of the novel, readers become aware of a different kind of Chican@ experience, one that is characterized by the persecution that comes with having a “dark brown” face and “Negroid features” (Paredes 9, 10). As the Rangers discuss their decision to let the buggy pass, they justify it by the fact that Lupe García, the other Mexican in the buggy, is not known to be a part of the “De la Peña” or Mexican rebel forces. During this discussion, “the other two Rangers, who were riding ahead, slowed their horses to a walk and squinted into the distance. ‘A nigger,’ one of them said, ‘a nigger-greaser. What do you think of that?’” (Paredes 11). Here, again, *El Negro*’s dark skin is portrayed as negative—both the term “nigger” and “nigger-greaser” blatantly offensive and derogatory. The Rangers not only acknowledge the African American influence on *El Negro*’s identity, but also code it as a negative. The question, “what do you think of that?” also serves to ostracize *El Negro*, objectifying and othering him. Paredes thus highlights the racial complexity of the Chicano experience and the unjust persecution that came with it.

Paredes highlights the mistreatment mixed-race Chicanos experienced from Americans while also emphasizing the racial hierarchy Mexicans perpetuated through his discussion of *El Negro*'s childhood. While talking with Feliciano, *El Negro* says, ““People on the *hacienda* used to say that the African blood had been distilled in my veins. Nothing of *criollo*²⁶ or Indian in me. My half-brothers didn't like me, of course...They were the ones who first called me El Negro when we were kids. Even the servants made fun of me”” (Paredes 77). In this moment, Paredes calls attention to the unique experience of being a Mexican-American of African-American descent. The use of the word “distilled” to describe the African blood in *El Negro*'s veins suggests a kind of otherness—*El Negro*'s ethnicity seemingly foreign to his “Indian” and “*criollo*” counterparts. Not only is *El Negro* subject to persecution by white people because of his Spanish accent and Mexican heritage, but he is also persecuted by his brothers and family servants for having “African features” (Paredes 77). Moreover, the very name, *El Negro*, is identified as derogatory as he claims that the nickname was a result of his half-brothers not liking him. Paredes thus highlights the persecution *El Negro* was subject to as it differs from and relates to other Mexican-American experiences and reveals the complex racial identity of Chicanos through his portrayal of *El Negro*'s experience growing up on the *hacienda*.

Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* portrays a complex Chican@ experience that denies the construction of Mexican-American identity as a purely two-part, homogenized experience. Through the characters of *La India* and *El Negro*, Paredes calls attention to specific Chican@ experiences, characterized by the influence of unique racial identities. As Anzaldúa demands an accounting for all three cultures that influence Chicanas—Mexican, American, and

²⁶ A person from Spanish South or Central America, especially one of pure Spanish descent (my footnote)

Indian—Paredes's *La India* explicitly does just that. Paredes even goes one step further than Anzaldúa demands, including an example of the African-American influence on Chicano identity through the character of *El Negro*. Though scholars such as Guidotti-Hernández and Anzaldúa would invite Paredes to extend his depiction of such characters into a pointed critique of the marginalization and persecution of such racialized Chican@ identities, I argue that his exposure of these experiences not only serves as a preliminary answer to Limón's call to approach the Chican@ experience as nuanced and regionalized, but also acknowledges the complex history of the South Texas borderland. Paredes's portrayal of racial identity constructs a history that includes both African Americans and Indians as active historical subjects. *Caballero*, however, largely ignores the presence of African Americans in the South Texas borderland and constructs a history in which Indians are presented as racially distinct from Mexicans.

I argue that in emphasizing the possibility of a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans, González and Raleigh participate in perpetuating a dichotomy characterized by U.S. hegemony. Guidotti-Hernandez believes that González's conceptualization of "Texas-Mexican identity is oppositionally constructed at the expense of Indians and blacks in South Texas" (Guidotti-Hernandez 140). I argue that this oppositional construction engages a binary that over-homogenizes the Mexican experience, largely ignoring the racial and historical complexity of the Chican@ population and the peopling of the South Texas borderland. Guidotti-Hernandez writes, "racism in González's texts provides an alternative narrative of the historical period in which she wrote" (Guidotti-Hernandez 135). Though Indians were the first settlers of the South Texas borderland, the group is portrayed as foreigners invading a land that is not theirs to claim. Moreover, throughout *Caballero*, Indians are represented as racially distinct from Chican@s despite the fact that Indians played a major role in the development of the

Chican@ population following Cortés's invasion.²⁷ In this way, González does provide an alternative narrative of the history of the period. This alternative narrative, however, also imagines a future in which Mexicans and white Americans are able to coexist. While the representation of Indians is problematic, I argue that this representation is a product of the authors' attempt to construct a binational, collaborative future. González and Raleigh's work of historical fiction is influenced by their understanding of their current world.

Padre²⁸ Pierre, a prominent priest in the borderland, exemplifies González and Raleigh's negative portrayal of Indians as a result of their promotion of a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans. In his attempt to advocate for the presence of Texas Rangers in an argument with the *hidalgos* at a town meeting, Padre Pierre paints Indians as the enemy, suggesting they are responsible for the attacks against Mexican travelers. He says, "Travel for you has been safer because of them; they have driven away the Indians again and again. Consider this—when the Rangers saved you the plundering of a dozen cows by Indians, you refused them even one for food" (González and Raleigh 55). Here, Padre Pierre recognizes the potential good that could come out of a truce between Americans and Mexicans, arguing that life in the Valley has been safer since the Americans arrived. Rather than participate in mutual violence that could ultimately end in mutual destruction, Padre Pierre suggests that the *hidalgos*, too, should recognize the good that the Rangers have done and reconsider the way they treat

²⁷ Anzaldúa suggests that the Chocise tribe were the initial inhabitants of Mexico and became "the direct ancestors" of many Mexican people (Anzaldúa 4). Despite the Chochise people's initial presence in Mexico, however, the land was taken over by Spaniards, led by conquistador Hernán Cortés. Bringing with them, "small pox, measles, and typhus," Cortés and his men drastically shifted the composition of the Mexican population (Anzaldúa 5). Those who survived the invasion were the *mestizos* or "people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood" who had acquired immunity to such terrible diseases (Anzaldúa 5). Anzaldúa qualifies the *mestizos*' survival as constituting the birth of a new race—Chican@s.

²⁸ Father

Americans. As he advocates for a more generous understanding of the Texas Rangers, he continues to conceptualize Indians as savages, distinct from Mexicans. While violence in the borderland included Indian attacks against Spanish settlers, conflicts within and between indigenous communities, and violence instigated by both Spanish and American settlers, Padre Pierre attempts to portray this violence as purely unidirectional—Indians attacking Mexicans, in effort to resolve the conflict between Mexicans and Texas Rangers.

As the conflict between Mexicans and Americans is presented as resolvable, Indians are identified as instigators of violence—a savage group of people attempting to take what is rightfully Mexican property. In the first few pages of the novel, Don Santiago describes the land his Spanish ancestors first settled as “Indian-infested” (González and Raleigh 20). The use of the word *infested* suggests that the Indians’ presence in Mexico is undesirable and potentially damaging. While Don Santiago’s Spanish ancestors are portrayed as “men of vision and courage,” the Indians who were already present in Mexico upon the arrival of the Spanish are portrayed as intrusive and wrongfully located (González and Raleigh 20). In an emotionally charged scene, one of Don Santiago’s servants, Tomás, reveals that some of Don Santiago’s cattle have been lost. As explanation for the disappearance, Tomás blames a group of violent Indians. He says, “One day, the Indians were there, and when we fought them in the valley, the others drove off the cattle behind the hills where we could not see them. When we went to follow we saw there were too many against us, and we had to let the cattle go” (González and Raleigh 166). Tomás’s account of the loss of the cattle portrays the Indians as attacking the innocent *peons* and attempting to steal from them. He describes the number of Indians present as “too many against us,” thus making the attack appear planned, malicious, and vindictive. Tomás’s treatment of the Indians as a violent, ill-intentioned group stealing from innocent, rightful owners

serves to other and degrade the Indians living in the Río Grande Valley. Indian identity is presented as indicative of a violent nature and something entirely separate from Mexican identity.

The categorization of Indians as an aggressive group separate from Mexicans is further revealed in what might be considered a passing moment in which Susanita reflects on her father's characteristic dominance. In a particularly good mood after receiving a letter from her lover, Warrenner, Susanita listens as her father makes an announcement. Don Santiago says, "There will be a *fiesta* when the *padre* comes, and you will arrange it, Petronilla. There have been fewer Indians, and it will be safe for our *ranchero* friends to be merry with us" (González and Raleigh 205). In this moment in the text, Don Santiago's continuous effort to demonstrate his dominance over his family is emphasized. As Susanita listens to her father's demands, the letter she hides beneath her dress is said to become "cold" as she wonders what her punishment might be when Don Santiago finds what she has been hiding (González and Raleigh 205). She understands her father's power over their family and fears what will come when he realizes she has disobeyed him. While Don Santiago's authority is pronounced in this moment, what is decidedly important is his declaration that the party will be safer as there will be "fewer Indians" Don Santiago categorizes himself as separate from the antagonistic Indians that pose a threat to his and his community's safety. Indians are portrayed as the sole source of violence in the South Texas borderland, their lessened presence automatically rendering the area safer.

González and Raleigh, in their representation of the past, oversimplify the Indian presence in the South Texas borderland. In attempting to portray a past in which future collaboration between Mexicans and U.S. Americans is possible, González and Raleigh smooth

over the problematic history²⁹ that actually characterized the area. González and Raleigh portray the conflict in the borderland as Indians versus Mexicans—the two groups necessarily opposed rather than establishing relationships and living cohesively. As the authors attempt to imagine a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans, they emphasize the injustice of patriarchy in Chican@ society but oversimplify the racial complexity of the land. Their imagining of a bicultural future, however, is progressive in that it recognizes the humanity of the American people, an aspect often overlooked in traditional Chican@ literature.

While the representation of Americans in *Caballero* is progressive, there are certain characters in the text who perpetuate traditional, regressive, Chican@ ideals that reinforce the racial hierarchy and exhibit elitist attitudes.³⁰ I argue that while certain characters do exhibit a distinct nostalgia³¹ for aristocratic culture, the text ultimately performs a subtle critique of this elitist attitude, as those who refuse to abandon or adjust their belief in this system ultimately face unfavorable fates. The critique to which I refer is embodied in the attitudes of the younger Chican@ generation, *Americanos*, and some *peons*. As González and Raleigh imagine a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans, the characters challenge the hierarchical system and construct an inclusive space with room for social mobility.

Don Santiago embodies the most pronounced example of an imperialist nostalgia, exhibiting outward racism towards his servants and engaging in a racial hierarchy that places his

²⁹ Guidotti-Hernandez argues that González’s “selective forgetting of a historically and regionally accurate array of indigenous communities in Texas attempts to smooth over a very violent and problematic history” (Guidotti-Hernandez 140).

³⁰ Guidotti-Hernandez argues that González’s work exhibits a kind of “imperialist nostalgia,” a “nostalgia for a past when conquistadors of aristocratic means ruled the land, an attitude which sets up a desire to maintain a kind of racial and class structure that originated with early imperialist practices in New Spain” (Guidotti-Hernandez 138). I argue that certain characters exhibit this attitude, but the work itself does not.

³¹ Here, I borrow Guidotti-Hernandez’s term, “nostalgia” (Guidotti-Hernandez 138).

servants inherently below him. In a conversation with Doña Dolores, Don Santiago reveals that his perception of *peons* is a product of a racial prejudice, rather than personal experience. When Doña Dolores suggests that the *peons* on the *hacienda* are angry with Don Santiago's behavior, he responds vehemently, "Should I run my affairs by the feelings of a creature like a *peon*? A thing with the body of a man and without his soul?" (González and Raleigh 172). In this moment, engaging in a vast overgeneralization, Don Santiago categorizes *peons* as "creatures," effectively dehumanizing the group of people. Don Santiago believes these "creatures" are different from him and thus unworthy of his attention. Don Santiago further degrades the *peons* as he refers to them as having "bodies" but no "souls." Because Don Santiago is a religious man, his suggestion that the *peons* have no souls is a harsh critique. When the Spanish first conquered the Indian inhabitants of the Texas-Mexico borderlands, they justified their violence by claiming that they were saving the souls of those they harmed physically, as they would eventually convert them to Catholicism and their souls would become valued in the eyes of God. Don Santiago's statement that *peons* have no souls thus suggests that he believes they are not valued by God and do not have the potential to be "saved." Don Santiago categorizes *peons* as lesser than—soulless creatures undeserving of his consideration and unworthy of God's attention.

Despite Don Santiago's contempt for *peons*, the Mendoza y Soría family's servants, at times, undermine his power. The *peons*' subversion of the traditional hierarchy of power serves to portray Don Santiago's elitist attitude as futile and ironic. Old Paz, the housekeeper of the Rancho Palma de Cristo *hacienda*, oftentimes demonstrates power over Don Santiago despite her socially inferior position. This power is demonstrated in a scene in which Old Paz demands that her great-grandson, Manuel, be allowed to come with her and the Mendoza y Soría family to the winter home in Matamoros. The narration reads, "there were times when Don Santiago was not

master. To save his face he let Doña Dolores do the arguing—knowing, as they all knew, that Paz would have her way” (González and Raleigh 32). The phrase “to save his face” suggests that Don Santiago wishes to uphold a pretense of authority despite the fact that he is aware that Paz will get her way. While Don Santiago does exhibit an elitist attitude, this attitude feels nostalgic even in the active moment. It seems that Don Santiago, at least subconsciously, is aware that his power over his subjects is changing. The *hidalgo* wants to maintain a social hierarchy in which he is the all dominant master, however, this attitude appears useless as the servant ultimately obtains what she desires.

Throughout *Caballero*, opposition to the hierarchy of power is also presented in the younger generation of Mexicans. After José, a *peon*, accompanies Susanita to protect her and preserve her dignity on her journey to save her brother and be reunited with her lover, Susanita remarks, “I must tell them how fine José was, papá must know that. I was raised to think that *peons* do not matter, but I see differently now” (González and Raleigh 274). As his children grew up on the *hacienda*, Don Santiago attempted to instill an attitude of superiority in them. He taught them that “*peons*...were his to discipline at any time with the lash, to punish by death if he so chose” (González and Raleigh 33). As Susanita matures, however, she learns that *peons* are capable, kind, caring human beings. She recognizes her father’s lack of respect for the servants and hopes to show him that they, too, are worthy of attention, love, and praise. Don Santiago’s elitist attitude becomes ridiculous in the eyes of his children. Susanita represents the new generation of Mexicans, willing and able to recognize the good in *peons* and women alike, while Don Santiago serves as an example of the stubborn generation of elitist *hidalgos*. González and Raleigh, in their representation of Don Santiago’s attitude as ineffective and frivolous, perform a critique of the aristocratic attitude that disregarded the importance of *peons*.

González and Raleigh similarly critique the exclusive, elitist *hidalgo* attitude through their portrayal of *Americanos* as inclusive and open to upward social mobility. Red McLane, Angela's American suitor, provides an example of this open-mindedness when he meets the *peon* Tecla's newborn son. He says, “‘*Señora*, when he is grown he will have a word to say about the way he will be governed’” (González and Raleigh 208). Red McLane, here, suggests that Tecla's son will one day grow up to challenge authority. At this suggestion, Doña Dolores responds, “‘How utterly foolish! This child is a *peon*, señor’” (González and Raleigh 208). Doña Dolores's response emphasizes her belief in the hierarchical system in which *peons* ranked below *hidalgos*. Doña Dolores consistently presents resistance to Don Santiago's patriarchal dictatorship, however, her surprise at Red McLane's suggestion serves to highlight her exclusionary attitude towards *peons*. While Doña Dolores is willing to challenge Don Santiago's authority despite the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal system, she is not yet able to fathom a world in which *peons* are equal to *hidalgo* elites. As the moment in Tecla's *jacal*³² continues, Red McLane responds,

‘If it is his will, not otherwise. A servant, perhaps but not bound as now. Ah, *señora*, if I could only show you people how powerful you can be with your voice in the government, with the proper leader—for the poor have a voice under our law as well as the rich.’

(González and Raleigh 208)

In this moment, Red McLane imagines a future in which *peons* have a voice, a future in which both the poor and the rich are considered in making political decisions. Red McLane thus portrays the American system of government as inclusive and democratic in a way that the Mexican system is not.

³² Hut, *peons* on *haciendas* lived with their families in these facilities

Through characters like Red McLane, a young American soldier, Susanita, a progressive Chicana, and Paz, a respected, experienced *peon*, González and Raleigh challenge the hierarchical system in which *peons* are inferior to their *hidalgo* counterparts. As González and Raleigh recount a story of mid-nineteenth-century southern Texas, they reimagine the history of the period, including characters who are capable and willing to believe in a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans. While characters like Don Santiago, do perpetuate the *hidalgo* system and, in this sense, embody the “imperialist nostalgia” that Guidotti-Hernández highlights, these characters are ultimately left out of the future that González and Raleigh imagine (Guidotti-Hernández 138). At the end of the novel, Don Santiago lies dead “in the aloneness he made” (González and Raleigh 336). Don Santiago’s unchanging attitude distances him from the rest of his family. He feels resentment towards his children who have left the *hacienda* in pursuit of love, towards his sister who aided his children in abandoning him, towards his *peons* who challenged his authority, and towards his wife who remains in contact with his children. While an alternative ending in which Don Santiago appears triumphant or happy would serve to commend his rigid adherence to Mexican elitist ideals, his isolation seems indicative of a critique of his belief system and consequent way of life.

Young Chican@s, *Americanos*, and *peons* present resistance to the dominant, elitist patriarchal ideals that characterize traditional Mexican society throughout *Caballero*. Through this resistance, González and Raleigh construct a narrative of the historical period that imagines a way forward, a convergence of “two antagonistic” societies (González 113). While *Caballero* conceptualizes a collaborative future between Mexicans and Americans, Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez* largely suggests that this kind of collaboration is not possible. Because both texts were written in the 1930s, the narrative histories they construct seem to communicate

something about each author's conceptualization of their present.³³ As the characters in *Caballero* attempt to negotiate their changing world, González and Raleigh construct a future in which collaboration seems possible. The idea that collaboration is possible between Mexicans and Americans suggests an optimistic conceptualization of the authors' present. Paredes's *George Washington Gómez*, however, constructs a narrative in which American hegemony necessitates an abandonment of Mexican identity. In Paredes's South Texas options for the Mexican-American are limited—abandon your family and submit to American authority or be doomed to a life of poverty on a Mexican *hacienda*.

The abandonment of Mexican identity is most profoundly embodied in the character of Guálinto. Guálinto, though monetarily successful, ultimately fails to successfully negotiate between his conflicting worlds. Guálinto's late father hoped that his son would become a hero of his people. Despite his father's dreams and his family's efforts to cultivate a champion of the Mexican people in Brownsville, Texas, Guálinto ultimately abandons his family to attend an American school and accepts a job as a border security agent for the United States government. Guálinto does not become the person his family and his peers dreamed he would be. In his adolescent years, Guálinto harbored a sense of discontent regarding the way Mexicans were treated in South Texas. When his high school classmates organize an event to go to *La Casa Mexicana* to celebrate their graduation, three of the students are turned away because, as the bouncer says, "Order is no Mexicans" (Paredes 173). Though Guálinto is granted admission due to the light appearance of his skin, he refuses to enter, "unless they go in too" (Paredes 172). Here, Guálinto actively chooses to identify with his Mexican side. He feels an obligation to stand by his Mexican peers and refuses to attend an event where they are not welcome.

³³ Or the period the authors wrote their texts in

By the end of the novel, Guálinto seems to have abandoned his Mexican identity, conforming to U.S. ideals to achieve monetary success. One of the final scenes in the novel presents a particularly stark contrast to Guálinto's high school decision to stand in solidarity with his Mexican peers. Guálinto returns home from college to his hometown and is asked to attend a meeting with some of his old classmates. The meeting, Guálinto soon finds out, is a meeting to organize an effort to overcome the American influence in Brownsville. His old classmates, excited to finally have someone "properly educated" on their side, ask Guálinto to lead their efforts. Guálinto is pessimistic about his classmates' plan—challenging their ideas and ultimately refusing to help them. As he walks out, his old friend, Elodia, one of the three Mexicans turned away at *La Casa Mexicana*, yells after him, "Cabron!³⁴ *Vendido*³⁵ sanavabiche!" (Paredes 294). Elodia's use of the word *vendido* suggests that the anger she feels towards Guálinto stems from a feeling of betrayal. Guálinto, once willing to stand up for his Mexican classmates against Anglo authority, has accepted a job working as a border security agent for the American government. Guálinto has, perhaps in the most obvious way, abandoned his Mexican people to join forces with the Americans.

Guálinto's decision to accept a job with the American government seems to be a product of the influence of the Anglo school system. Throughout the novel, Guálinto's ideology that differs from his family's is portrayed as a product of his schooling. Discussing possibilities for his future education with his Uncle Feliciano, Guálinto is horrified when his uncle suggests he could peddle vegetables to earn the extra money Guálinto would need to attend college. Feliciano responds to Guálinto's reaction, "They have been teaching you strange things in that

³⁴ Asshole

³⁵ Sellout

Gringo school. Honest work is not shameful, even peddling in the streets” (Paredes 192). In this moment, Guálinto and Feliciano’s differing conceptualizations of success become apparent. Feliciano takes pride in “honest work,” while Guálinto dreams of Americanized, monetary success. Feliciano’s comment that Guálinto has been learning “strange things” in his “Gringo school” suggests that Feliciano believes Guálinto’s changing ideology is a product of his Americanized schooling. While Feliciano has worked hard to ensure that his nephew would be able to attend school, it seems he did not expect the education system to affect Guálinto in such a way.

Feliciano believes that Guálinto’s negative attitude towards his Mexican identity stems from the Anglo-American education system. For Feliciano, Guálinto’s changing conceptualization of what constitutes success is a product of what he has been taught to value in school. Because Guálinto ultimately abandons his Mexican identity, the novel suggests that the Anglo-American school system transforms Chicano students and turns them into self-disciplining beings who internalize racism. Upon graduation, Guálinto feels his only opportunity to achieve success demands that he abandon his heritage. The influence of the U.S. school system on Guálinto’s decision seems pointedly important when coupled with Elodia’s outrage at Guálinto’s unwillingness to help resist American forces. Elodia, as a female character, did not have the opportunity to attend college, and thus was less domesticated and conventionalized by the education system itself. She recognizes the effect of Guálinto’s education on his decisions because she has not received this education herself. Through Guálinto’s ultimate decision to work as a border security agent for the American government, Paredes portrays the U.S. school system as perpetuating a dichotomy characterized by U.S. dominance.

Paredes thus constructs a narrative in which equality and full coexistence between Americans and Mexicans cannot be realized when structural and institutional inequality cannot be overcome. Though Guálinto attempts to negotiate the different aspects of his identity throughout the novel, he ultimately abandons his Mexican roots. In this way, Paredes presents Mexican and American identity as enduringly oppositional and antagonistic. The conceptualization of Mexican identity, however, is racially inclusive. Paredes includes in his narrative African American and Indian Chican@s as active subjects. While the novel largely suggests that binational collaboration is impossible, it constructs a complex picture of Chican@ identity, paying attention to the nuances of the Indian and African American influenced Chican@ experience. *Caballero*, on the other hand, is a binational novel—written collaboratively by a Chicana woman and an American woman—but relies on racial binaries to define the Chican@ experience. Indian identity is constructed as entirely separate from Mexican identity—the group’s presence in the South Texas borderland suggested as intrusive and antagonistic, while African American identity is largely ignored. Though *Caballero* exhibits certain racist tendencies that marginalize African Americans and Indians as active historical subjects, it represents a world in which social mobility and democracy are possible. Perhaps *Caballero* overlooks certain (important) racial complexities in effort to promote a binational, collaborative future. The text, written in the 1930s but reflecting on an earlier period of Mexican-American history, is influenced by the authors’ conceptualization of their present. González and Raleigh attempt to imagine their present in the past, thus providing an alternative narrative of the history of the period—a narrative that has consequences for the novel’s take on both race and gender.

Caballero and *George Washington Gómez* are both texts that are interested in representing Mexican-American history. While *Caballero* is a work of historical fiction, González and Raleigh focusing on the 1846-1848 period of borderland history, *George Washington Gómez* represents Paredes's present, his experience of 1930s and 40s South Texas. González and Raleigh construct a narrative of the period that allows for a cross-cultural empathy between Mexicans and Americans. Although certain characters exhibit a desire to cling to aristocratic, imperialistic ideology, this narrative also constructs a space in which social mobility is possible. In emphasizing the possibility of cross-cultural empathy, González and Raleigh create an over-homogenized portrayal of the Chican@ experience. The authors' portrayal of the history of the period as collaborative suggests a conceptualization of their present as, at least partially, influenced by both Mexicanness and Americanness. Paredes, on the other hand, constructs a narrative that pays attention to the racial complexities of the Chican@ experience. Paredes includes African American and Indian Chican@ characters as active subjects, thus demanding that his readers acknowledge the presence of such racial identities in the South Texas borderland. Though racially inclusive in its portrayal of the Chican@ borderland experience, Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* ultimately refuses to imagine a binational future, thus suggesting a conceptualization of the present in which Mexicans remain dominated by American hegemony. While neither text represents a conventional³⁶ picture of Mexican-American history, both create complex portraits of the Chican@ experience. These differing portrayals highlight the subjectivity of history and remind readers to take time to listen to each and every story and understand how narratives of history are influenced by perspective.

³⁶ I use conventional here to reference the kind of history that might appear in an American textbook. This history traditionally portrays the Mexican land as rightfully American property.

Conclusion

As my work on this project comes to a close, I find myself returning to the idea of alternative narratives of history. *Caballero*, written in the 1930s, attempts to represent life in the borderlands following the American victory in the Mexican-American war. González and Raleigh construct a story in which the present they experience is conceptualized as their characters' future. The work relies on a racial binary to define the Chican@ experience—largely omitting African Americans and Indians as active historical subjects. In attempting to negotiate their present in their representation of the past, González and Raleigh create an over-homogenized portrait of Mexican identity. The optimist in me would like to qualify this oversight as a product of the racially inclusive world the authors live in. The pessimist, however, recognizes that racial inclusivity is hardly a reality in even today's modern world. I conceptualize *Caballero*, then, as a work of historical fiction, a creative project, that attempts to identify the beginnings of a new generation of Chican@s before its realization. González and Raleigh utilize defiant female characters to challenge traditional Mexican *autoridad* and highlight American social mobility to critique the racial hierarchy of Chican@ culture.

George Washington Gómez, written in the 1930s and 40s, constructs a picture of Américo Paredes's contemporary social setting. Paredes's project, today, appears less optimistic than González and Raleigh's. The narrative Paredes constructs highlights the racial complexity of Chican@ identity, however, in doing so, it mostly elucidates the persecution that came with such identities. Paredes's attention to this persecution suggests that the world he lives in remains characterized by unjust treatment brought about by an "othered" racial identity. This idea is further solidified by Paredes's ultimate suggestion that success in an Anglo-dominated world necessitates that one conform to Anglo ideals and abandon any foreign identity. Paredes's text

does not embody a feminist critique of the patriarchal tradition that characterizes Mexican culture; however, it does highlight the absurdities and challenges of Paredes's reality—the challenges and expectations associated with being a patriarch in a Mexican world.

Paredes and González and Raleigh, writing in the same historical moment, construct two strikingly different representations of the Chican@ experience. While traditionally presented as oppositional texts, I believe that placing the novels in conversation with one another ignites an interesting conversation not only about the experience of being categorized a foreigner in one's native land, but also about narratives of history. González and Raleigh's *Caballero* reminds readers to acknowledge the existence of the small before they become the big—the *peons* who will eventually supersede their *hidalgo* counterparts, the women who will someday make decisions for the *rancho*. The narrative of history that González and Raleigh present is a narrative in which the reality the authors experience is imagined as it developed in the past. In attempting to construct this history, however, González and Raleigh over-homogenize the Mexican experience, suggesting that the world they live in, too, conceptualizes Mexican identity as a uniform experience. This view of González and Raleigh's is, perhaps counterintuitively, not entirely dissimilar from Paredes's portrayal of his reality. The very fact that Paredes takes time to highlight the unjust persecution that comes with various Chican@ identities suggests that racism remains a problem in the South Texas he experiences.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of my thesis: What about *George Washington Gómez* and *Cabellero* made readers and/or editors reluctant to accept the texts as profound Chican@ border writing? I have come to believe that the alternative historical narratives each novel presents can be given as reason for their delayed recognition as important Chican@ texts. I believe that both texts were written in the 1930s and not published until the

1990s because the pictures they constructed of the reality of their worlds were ones that the public was not ready to accept. Both texts needed a public that was willing and able to respond to the racism and gendered inequity present in the novels' stories. Further studies might explore the public's perception of these texts upon publication in more detail—perhaps delving into the major events of Mexican-American history in the period following publication as they relate to the gendered and racialized issues highlighted in this project.

While I do not claim that either text represents a totally objective portrayal of history, I believe that both texts remind readers to consider the lens through which history is narrated. I present Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero* and Américo Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* in conversation with one another in hopes of igniting a conversation in which each text is allowed to expose the gendered and racialized complexities of the other. I hope that readers are forced to recognize the realities these texts present and consider how their own realities might be represented going forward. *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez* remind their readers to consider the stories of the underrepresented and reflect on the dominant narratives of history that are unquestioningly accepted.

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