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Sem2\_Chapter\_Analysis

Chapter 3-4 Analysis

Ch. 3

This chapter covers the events that happen in Mexico’s far North after Mexican Independence from Spain and the events that lead to America’s controversial seizure of Mexico’s Northern territories through the war of 1847 or “Polk’s war.” This chapter talks about the condition and troubles of each of Mexico’s Northern States, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, after independence. Gonzales then spends a good amount of time covering the influx of Anlglo-settlers into Texas and Texas’s eventual independence. Finally, the chapter goes over how President Polk used shallow excuses to get Mexico to wage war on them so America could do one of the most unequal land-grabs in history.

At first glance, I thought that this chapter would be another less-than-passionate, objective, chronological observance of events like I read in chapter one, but I was soon proven wrong. I liked how Gonzales divided the chapter into the different states to show us, for example, how the situation in California was vastly different than that in Arizona. By doing this I was well prepared for the events leading to the cessation of Texas and the Mexicans different reactions to America’s staged war.

The thing that surprised me the most about this chapter was everything. Please allow me to explain. I was surprised by how little I had been taught about this subject even though I was born and raised in California. I barely remember anything about America’s acquisition of the Southeastern territory or why we got into a war with Mexico in the first place. I can now see why the writers of our textbooks might have chosen to skim over some of the inconvenient details. For example, I didn’t know that according to most Chicano scholars, “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo…is one of the harshest treaties between countries of the last two centuries with regard to territorial acquisition”(80). One would think that this would be something that every American South Westerner should know considering that these people are our immediate neighbors and we should know about any lingering grievances that may exist between us.

I know that some of my classmates were probably surprised, if not insulted, by Gonzales’s portrayal of America’s treatment of the Mexicans before and during the war, but I like to think of myself as being more open-minded than the general public. I’m the type of person who has a hard time discerning the difference between nationalism and patriotism. I tend to get my news through independent media like Democracy Now and NPR, so I was able to read Gonzales’s account of events and see the logic in what he was writing. I think he did a great job of showing the events as they happened and don’t see anything wrong with showing some passion occasionally.

Ch. 4

This chapter covers the events that occur in the Southwest in the second half of the nineteenth century after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The chapter is split up into sections on California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas because the situation in each State was very different than the others. More specifically, Gonzales covers the social relationships between the Mexicanos, Anglos, and American Indians, and how, no matter which state, the minorities were sorely mistreated by the new arrivals from the East.

At first glance, this chapter seems to be just a chronicle of the mistreatment of the Mexicans and Indians by the Anglo Americans, but what caught my eye was the major differences in the state of affairs between each State. For example, in Texas there had already been a history of racism after the Alamo and on top of that there was a huge surge of Anglo Americans from the East because of cattle-ranching opportunities. Because of this, the Mexicanos were outnumbered, socially marginalized and mistreated. However, the situation in New Mexico was very different because they did not see a large immigration of Anglo Americans until almost the 20th century. I was also surprised to see how dependent the people living in Arizona were on the Sonorans of Mexico until the transcontinental railroad was built.

The theory of Social Banditry definitely stood out to me the most in this chapter. It’s interesting that I got more information about this time period from Hollywood movies like “The Mask of Zorro” than I ever did from my Elementary, Middle, or High School education. As I did not know much about these “Robin Hoods” of the South West beforehand, reading this chapter proved to be very interesting. It was exciting to read how a famous bandit like Vasquez was from Monterey and that Vasquez Rocks, where I went camping as a child, was named after him. Although I have not read enough to be an expert on the subject, I do not feel these people were wrong in taking the law into their own hands when confronted with and unjust system.

The story of how El Paso was split into two cities, one American and one Mexican, before the boarder was readjusted was fascinating to me. Today we hear a lot about Ciudad Juarez because of the drug cartels and boarder violence that has occurred. Again, I wonder why we learn so much European history, spend so much time on the revolutionary war, but learn so little on the conquest of the American Southwest. I feel that it is a little bit sad that a lot of Americans learn about the Southwest through cowboy movies and other Hollywood interpretations. It’s no wonder that in many states, people support less-than-fair immigration policies and form violent boarder watches. If we understood more of our shared history, then I believe there would be much less hate.

I really like how Gonzales lays out the information and is often very detailed in his stories, but I often wonder what is going on in Washington while everything is happening. Sometimes he gets so detailed that I fail to see the big picture of what he is trying to tell.