

Steven Silbert
Andrade
Span308-90
CSUMB Spring12

Chapter1-2-Analysis

Chapter one, as Gonzales explains in the beginning, is basically a history of the Spaniards and the Native Americans to give a backdrop to the eventual merging of these two cultures into the Mexico and Southwest United States that we know today. Gonzales starts Spain's history going all the way back to the Upper Paleolithic period when "primitive people dwelling in the Iberian Peninsula began to leave evidence of an emerging culture"(9). He then goes on to tell how the Romans were probably the singularly most important influence of the Spanish culture giving them all kinds of technology and the Roman Catholic religion which the Spanish took to heart probably more than any other culture. Another important part of Spain's history would be its contact with the Moors and the Sephardic Jews until the Moors expelled the Jews around 1146 and were in turn expelled by the Christians during the *Reconquista*. The Spanish section ends with an explanation of Columbus and the debate that goes on to this day about his role in history.

The "Amerindians" section of this chapter explains the history of the "almost one hundred million inhabitants" that occupied the North and South America at the time of contact(15). More specifically, this chapter describes how heterogeneous the Native Americans of Central America were at that time. He starts with the Olmecs and how their society became complex enough to have a stratified social hierarchy with slaves at the bottom. The next society he covers is the Mayans with their rapid growth to the mysterious abandonment of their towns. The most eminent of the Amerindian societies at the time of the Spanish arrival was the Aztecs or the Mexica as they called themselves who originated from the North of Mexico. Unfortunately for the Mexica, when Cortes arrived Moctezuma made a series of unfortunate choices including letting the Spanish into their city which led to the eventual downfall of Tenochtitlan. This could not have been achieved without the help of the neighboring Tlaxcalans who held a big grudge against their oppressive neighbors.

I was surprised at first when reading this chapter at how far back in history Gonzales chose to go. I was impressed by the detailed history of Spain in particular. It really helped me get into the minds of the Spaniards who first made contact with the Americas. I understood just how religiously zealous they were, but at the same time I understood how their continuous contact over the years with Moorish society might have led them to be more accepting of the mixing of races. One key event that got my attention was the day of 13 August 1521 when the Spanish and other native enemies of the Aztecs surrounded Tenochtitlan. The Mexica warriors who would rather kill themselves than be captured by the enemies reminded me very much of the Samurai of Japan. All in all, I feel that Gonzales did a really good job of covering the initial contact between the Spanish and the Native Americans. I never felt myself rooting for one side or the other. Rather, I was able to empathize with both sides and see where the main players were coming from.

Chapter 2 entitled “The Spanish Frontier” covers the Spanish exploration up into Alta California, the Sonoran Desert, New Mexico and Texas among other places. I noticed that a good part of this chapter is dedicated to the people who did the exploring such as the Franciscans, the Jesuits and the military and some of the conflicts that arose when deciding how to run the missions that were underpopulated and spread out far apart from each other. Another part of this chapter that stuck out to me in particular was the Spanish interactions with the different Native American Societies of the North. Lastly Gonzales covers the struggle to occupy Texas as first the French and then the Americans began to encroach on Spanish territory.

•What were your first impressions of the chapters?

My first impression of Chapter 2 was that there is a huge amount of explorers who paved the way to settlement up North and many of them were Jesuit or Franciscan priests like Father Dino who was largely responsible for the missions in Sonora. Again, Gonzales goes into much more detail than I have experience with when it comes to the colonialization of the Americas. One event or situation that really stands out in my mind is the relationship between the Spanish, the Pueblo Indians and the *indios barbaros*. The Spanish tended to settle near Pueblo villages and exploit the local populations, but the relationship was one without much fighting. This *indios barbaros* such as the Apache and the Comanche Indians were enemies of both the Pueblo and the Spanish. It was interesting for me to read yet again about how some of the local population would gang up with the Spanish to fight against the more aggressive Native Americans. I find it interesting to see yet again how like at Tenochtitlan history repeats its-self.

Before reading this chapter I had studied about California’s history, specifically how Cabrillo and Vizcaino explored the California coastline. I also learned about the local Indian populations like the Chumash and the Olohne Indians. What I had not studied as much was the Spanish frontier in the rest of the Southwest. Gonzales does a really good job of painting vivid geographical maps in your head while your reading. I liked how he compared the Northern settlements to three fingers spreading out into North America. I also learned about the different types of Native Americans that were present in the Southwest, such as the agricultural non-moving Pueblos and the nomadic Apaches. I thought it was very interesting that the Nomadic Indians had only recently arrived just before the Spanish had. Yet again, I’m going to have to say that I liked the way Gonzales presented this chapter. He did not leave me feeling biased toward one side or the other, rather I was able to further empathize with all of the historical figures.