Review of *En Aquel Entonces: Readings in Mexican-American History* Edited by Manuel G. Gonzales and Cynthia M. Gonzales

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In their introduction editors Manuel G. and Cynthia M. Gonzales claim their task is to examine the diversity and complexity of “Chicano history” from the sixteenth through the twenty-first centuries. This is an ambitious undertaking, and they acknowledge that “the story is too varied and complex to be incorporated under a single rubric” (xi). Still, the effort is certainly worthwhile and in this case fairly effective.

The sheer volume of chronologically arranged articles (thirty-one) is impressive, as is the roster of contributors. Topics such as Tejano life in Texas, land grant adjudication, labor unrest in California, beet workers on the Great Plains, Mexican American education, Texas-Mexican music, and Chicana feminist discourse are addressed by such eminent scholars as Frank Jesus de las Tejas, Arnoldo De Leon, Dennis Nodin Valdes, Guadalupe San Miguel, and Carlos Munoz Jr. Providing readers with information on Mexican American life and labor in many areas of the United States, the essays offer a sense of the breadth and scope of this important and expanding field of historical study.
The book, however, has its faults. While the quantity of material presented merits praise, such bulk also creates liabilities. So many articles crammed into a scant 264 pages of text often left this reviewer wanting more information and richer development. The editors’ reduction of complex essays into seven-to-nine page tracts often produced items both disjointed and choppy. Finally, unlike the Major Problems in History series, the editors do not provide an extensive historiographical discussion allowing readers to discern how each article fits into the broader discussion among specialists. Such faults could have been avoided by reducing the number of essays and providing space for other essential elements.

In sum, En Aquel Entonces offers a broad introduction to the field and would serve as a useful reader for a freshman or sophomore level, though not an upper division, class. It could also be paired with Manuel G. Gonzales’s recent Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States (1999), which provides an extensive historiographical discussion and up-to-date bibliography. This is an important work in serving as a ramp to one of the most dynamic and important fields in American history today. Perhaps its imperfections could be done away with in future editions of what should become a fairly popular reader. Jorge Iber, Department of History, Texas Tech University.