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Review of The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict

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The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict. By Richard Griswold del Castillo. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Preface, maps, illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xv + 251 pp. \$22.95.

This unique work by a pioneer in Chicano history is perhaps one of the most inspiring works to date on the subject of Mexicans in the United States, a contention to which I will return. The study contains a brief history of the end of the Mexican American War in 1847 and the negotiations between the two warring nations that were concurrent with the period.

The conflictive and contradictory nature of the negotiations is not surprising considering the unstable government in Mexico. There were at least six heads of state from the time Polk

declared war in May of 1846 to the conclusion of the war at the end of 1847. No small wonder that negotiations were characterized, even by the standards of international diplomacy, by intrigue, confusion, and disloyalty.

The political maze existing at the time the treaty was negotiated in early 1848 has made it difficult to determine the ideological-partisan stance of the group that had power to finalize the treaty, giving opportunity to both liberals and conservatives to blame their foes for selling out to the United States. Mexico lost much valuable land but in the end Mexican negotiators, working from an obvious disadvantage, were able to get some relatively favorable conditions for those Mexicans who remained north of Mexico's shrunken state. These provisions protected both property and civil rights even though they have been consistently denied to Chicanos from the nineteenth century to the present. Most of what the author writes is not new to the specialist, but it is summarized rather neatly and no mean contribution is made to historiographical discussion.

What is quite unique in this work is that it contains the most convincing argument to date as to why the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo has even more relevance in today's international atmosphere and as the population in the United States becomes more and more Latino. To those of us who received our scholarly training during the era of the Chicano movement, in the 1960s and 1970s, the treaty, as the author points out, became a focal point of contention giving the political postures of the era a *raison d'être*. The main reason for resurrecting an interest in the treaty was to discuss just how the rights given to Chicanos were *not* upheld and even though at times the tone of this debate was shrill and polemical, the process raised consciousness and was extremely educational.

Discussion of this issue seems to have faded away as the Chicano movement has turned away from confrontation tactics. But the Griswold del Castillo book demonstrates that the concern for the document was not just trendy posturing, becoming irrelevant along with other trends of

the late sixties and seventies. He shows that there has been consistent discussion and political action revolving around the document as recently as 1990. I find the work somewhat inspiring and renovating.

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