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The Southwestern Word Box

AMERICAN speech, like American life, has experienced rapid and strenuous changes in covering a continent. The English of the Pilgrims has ventured into new ways of life and into new territories unlike the Stratford of Shakespeare or the London of King James. Old peoples have been encountered on this new continent, and Europeans of both Teutonic and Romance stock have mingled to join both hands and speech. In this treasury or thesaurus of words, we wish to amass a store of information about the language of the Southwestern United States. American English it, in general, is, but English retaining vestiges from the past of trapper, trader, voyageur in the Southwest, actively aware of the lingo of vaquero and cow-puncher, constantly exposed to naturalized and alien loan-words from Spanish and Indian speech. We solicit lists of Southwesternisms with explanations of their forms and usage. We are interested, as well, in place names and stories of their sources and meanings. The lore of name and colloquial speech has a genuine romance. No region provides a richer stock of it than our own.

Amerind:

I have been wondering, for instance, who first used the term *Amerind* for the American Indian, and whether we shall have to wait for the *Historical Dictionary of American English* to be published from the University of Chicago, to find out. The word has been called to my attention in the book of Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, *Breaking the Wilderness*. He employs the form generally through the book for the North American Indian: "those indomitable, iron-nerved people, the Amerinds; the North-American of yesterday." (Preface, p. vi). In a comment occurring late in the book, Dellenbaugh writes that the word *Amerind* is "a substitute word, compounded of the first two syllables of American and the first syllable of Indian, adopted by some leading ethnologists." Although events recorded in

Breaking the Wilderness occur so early as 1871-2, the publication date is 1904. How much earlier the ethnologists employed the form and whether it appears in unprofessional use earlier than this date is of interest to me.

Anglo-American:

The compound noun *Anglo-American* is considerably older than the derivative *Amerind*. It is not of Southwestern origin, though since the middle of the nineteenth century it has been chiefly current in this region or in respect to this region. The word appears in the *Writings* (1781-2) of Thomas Jefferson applied to the Canadians. However, another eighteenth century author, Jedediah Morse, whose book, *The American Universal Geography* (1789), appeared in the same decade, clearly explains his use of the term *Anglo-American* as applying to Americans of English descent.¹ The first use of the term in the Southwest recorded by the *New English Dictionary* appears in regard to the Anglo-American colonists in Texas and bears the date 1842. Eight years earlier, however, a traveler into New Mexico, one Albert Pike, adventurer, Masonic organizer, poet and man of letters, had written that there was a prairie south of the river Arkansas "parts of it never trodden by the foot or beheld by the eye of an Anglo-American," a statement no doubt still supportable. The adjective, *Anglo-American*, used to describe relations between England and the United States is of comparatively recent date.

Gringo:

The word *gringo* is first recorded in the *New English Dictionary* for the year 1884, as it appeared in *Harper's Magazine* described as a "term of ridicule and obloquy applied to Americans throughout all Mexico." Folk lore and popular literature have ascribed to it a number of curious origins. Senor Isidoro Armijo, of Albuquerque, has recorded one of the current beliefs concerning *gringo* and the

1. I am indebted to Mrs. Bella Brodsky, of the University of Chicago, assistant to Sir William Craigie, editor of the *Historical Dictionary of American English*, for confirmation of the note on Morse and for supplying the note on Jefferson.

singing of American soldiers in the Mexican war. In translation, the story runs:

In the year of 1846-7, the marching song of the American soldiers in Mexico was: "Green Grow the Rushes, O." The soldiers sang this song from the port of Vera Cruz to the castle of Chapultepec—from Tampico to Monterrey. The words "Green Grow" impressed themselves in such a way on the memory of the Mexicans in association with the Americans that, shortly afterward, was coined the phrase *Gringo*, and thus the familiar word stayed in the Mexican vocabulary and in the Mexican language.

Senor Armijo correctly states the impossibility of the truth of such an origin for *gringo* by quoting the following words from a Spanish dictionary in four volumes, published in 1781 by Father Esteban Terrero y Pando. Again, I save you the trouble of translating:

Strangers in Malaga are called gringos if they have a certain kind of accent which keeps them from an easy and natural Castilian speech, and in Madrid the same thing is true and for the same cause with particularity toward the Irish.

Fifty-nine years before the Mexican war, strangers, Irish, or otherwise, were called gringos by the Spanish of Malaga and of Madrid, a damaging fact to the "Green Grow the Rushes, O" story, or to the following New Mexico folk tale, for which I am indebted to Mr. Arthur Campa.

Once upon a time a couple of Anglos ventured into Southwestern Texas for the first time. The Mexicans were curious to know who these people were, so they sent a little boy to spy on them. When he got within hearing distance, he listened to the conversation that was going on and heard the constant repetition of the words: *Green groves*. Later on these same Anglos returned, and the natives not knowing their nationality called them *Los Gringos*.

Efforts to associate *gringo* with *green* appear, consciously or unconsciously, in various statements about the word. Lieutenant Wise, of the United States navy, in 1849 published a book "Los Gringos," the title of which he explains as,

the epithet—and rather a reproachful one—used in California and Mexico to designate the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race; the definition of the word is somewhat similar to that of Greenhorns, in modern parlance, or Mohawks in the days of the Spectator.

George D. Brewerton, in a book called *Overland with Kit Carson*, printed serially by *Harper's Magazine* in 1853, wrote:

The nickname "Greaser" is no complimentary phrase, being intended as a set-off to the "Gringo"—plain English greenhorn—by which they are accustomed to designate us.

La Enciclopedia Universal Illustrada finds the etymological origin for *gringo* in *griego*, meaning "Greek," used colloquially "hablar en gringo," to speak an unintelligible language. We have the same idiom in English when we say a thing is "Greek" to us, meaning as unintelligible as the Greek language to most of us. *La Enciclopedia* finds the phrase common in South America where the singing of American soldiers can have had nothing to do with it.

How to account for the phonetic change from "griego" to "gringo" I do not pretend to suggest. Blasco Ibanez, in *Vistas Sud Americanas* (1920), volunteers the rather fanciful notion that *gringo* (in spite of applying to the Irish or Dutch or other non-Castilian speaking people in Europe) should apply with especial force to the English in Spanish America, because it contains in its accented syllable the sound of the accented syllable of *English*.

A popular legend in this state regarding "gringos salados" seems to find various interpretations, one of them retold by Ruth Laughlin Barker in *Caballeros*. She writes

that *gringos salados* was applied to the English because "strange freckles appeared to have been 'salted' freely upon their blond noses." Although this has picturesque values, I should like to see it supported by further testimony. Mr. Arthur Campa is authority for the following statement concerning *salado*.

The word *salado* (not to be confused with the idiom "tener sal") implies staleness or lack of proficiency. This word may be appended to such words as *viejo*, *huero*, *Mexicano*; etc., etc., with the same result.

This has a more authentic ring, for the use is adjectival, and the quality of saltiness or brinyness which is a flattering tribute to some states of being is a questionable compliment to others. No doubt in the eyes of the foe, the *gringos* were sufficiently unsavoury to be *salado*. The "freckle" account is vulnerable on the ground of the far from universal presence of freckles on *gringos* and especially on the tanned leathery countenances of the pioneers on whom the term was foisted.

Salado appears in a number of other uses. It is mentioned by Dobie¹ as applied to horses which have become wind-broken. The word is also referred to in the vocabulary of the cowboy by Hough.² It may or may not be worthwhile to point out Spanish *solada*, meaning dregs, lees, sediment. An adjectival use or noun compound could easily be related to *gringo*.

Greaser:

One other word I add, risking the loss of your patience; that is *greaser*. A most entertaining story is common among New Mexicans that in the days when ox-carts squeaked and screeched their way over Raton Pass, teamsters found it convenient to grease their outfits at the top of the steep grade before continuing their journey. A Mexican man made it a business to grease carts and wagons in the

1. Dobie, J. Frank; *A Vaquero of the Brush Country*, p. 207.

2. Hough, Emerson; *The Story of the Cowboy*.

early days. After a time, he became known to the wagon trains as the Mexican greaser. Señor Campa does not stake his reputation on the scientific value of this. What a paradox for the unknown Mexican to have given a slurring word to his folk by deeds of kindness such as helping the heavy Conestoga wagons make the grade.

I am grateful to Mrs. Austin for the comment in her article of this issue concerning the word Spanish Colonial, a descriptive and convenient term.

T. M. P.