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**Review of *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900* By Armando Alonzo**

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the trans-Mississippi West who confronted similar forces.

The author wishes to revise and update numerous long-standing interpretations of Texas-Mexican life in the Lower Valley of Texas (which includes those counties in deep South Texas that parallel the Rio Grande). He posits that Tejano history in the region begins with the first colonies founded during the 1750s—and not, as commonly assumed, after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848—and reminds us that those settlements struggled for survival at the same time as did the Central and East Texas communities (among them San Antonio, Goliad, and Nacogdoches) that the Spaniards established in the early eighteenth century. He shows a close connection between Tamaulipas (today on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande) and the Lower Valley during the colonial era and gives extensive treatment to the ranch and farm economy on what is now the Texas side of the international border as well as to the settlers' social world during that period.

Since historians have given more attention to events in the Lower Valley after 1848, there is a greater need for revising old portrayals of the earlier era. An older generation of Anglo historians wrote about a "no-man's land" in South Texas before the arrival of US immigrants after 1848, while Tejano historians during the 1970s focused on ways Anglos had stolen land from Mexicans. But Alonzo contends that neither argument is precise for certainly Tejanos had successfully occupied and worked the land since the colonial era and did not actually lose control of massive acreage until the mid-1880s. Tejanos have been depicted as either a historic folk or as a colonized people, but the author notes that they generally adapted to changing events while incorporating tenets of white society into their way of life. He observes that although historians heretofore have maintained that racial and ethnic divisions (between Anglos and Mexicans) produced

*Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900.* by Armando Alonzo. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Maps, tables, appendices, notes, index. xii + 357 pp. \$50.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

*Tejano Legacy* depicts Mexican Americans in Texas—the subjects of the inquiry—as historical actors engaged in a process of adjustment to wrest a living from a rough physical setting and a constantly changing social environment. Their experience in the Texas Borderlands resembled that of other settlers in

conflict and suspicion, such assessments need to be reconsidered, since enough space and opportunity existed in the frontier for Tejanos to do well as entrepreneurs and *rancheros*. Until now, most historians have subscribed to the argument that biased courts after 1848 played a detrimental role in dispossessing Tejanos of their lands, but Alonzo finds that generally the judicial system ruled quickly and favorably for Tejano grantees. Land tenure by Tejanos actually increased in the several decades following the arrival of Anglos at mid-century. While Alonzo agrees that a combination of chicanery, bad weather, and economic downturns contributed to the pattern of land loss, he identifies the partitioning of land among heirs and sales to family members as more accountable for that decline.

*Tejano Legacy*, then, represents a product of late twentieth-century scholarship. It profits from the numerous books and articles published on Tejano history over the course of the last thirty years, and the author is able to offer a corrective to earlier studies. The book is a valuable addition to those publications that continue to strengthen the New Western History.

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