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MEXICANISMO: FRANCISCO JAVIER CLAVIGERO AND THE JESUIT EXPULSION OF 1767

by Francisco Ortiz Jr.1

The formation of the Mexican national spirit or Mexicanismo has been studied throughout history. Many connect Miguel Hidalgo as the one who initiated this national spirit; however, could the events surrounding the 1767 expulsion of the Jesuits from Mexico have planted the seeds that led to the formation of the Mexican national spirit or Mexicanismo that permeates the culture?

This study will ask if the expulsion of the Jesuits played a part in the formation of this national spirit. In no way will this try to give a complete explanation of the events which led to the Jesuit expulsion, nor to explain the inner workings of Jesuit society and its influences. The focus will concentrate on the effect that the expulsion of Jesuits from New Spain, which was done by secret order and simultaneously across New Spain, may have had. Most of the Mexican Jesuits which were expelled eventually ended up in Bologna, Italy. Some of these individuals, notably Francisco Javier Clavigero, wrote books and dissertations concerning Mexico and its culture. Did these events and the subsequent writings play a role in forming the cultural sense of Mexicanismo?

Mexican Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavigero is recognized as being one of the most important contributors to the existing body of knowledge concerning ancient Mexico and its people. The writings of Clavigero are also important because they convey an early sense of nationalism. He seems to celebrate Mexico's pre-Hispanic past and identifies with the ancient Aztecs as Mexicans. Miguel Leon-Portilla expresses that Clavigero's greatest achievement is summarizing and putting in order the materials handed down from the first chroniclers of the world of ancient Mexico in his book "Historia Antigua de Mexico". This book was published in exile and is seen as the first serious attempt to show Europe an unbiased picture of the cultural values of ancient Mexico.² These exiled Jesuits tried to correct misconceptions that Europeans may have held.

Jesuits are members of the Catholic order named the Society of Jesus. Their history has, especially in the past, been shown in biased ways and Jesuit subjects have historically caused debate. Some writers have portrayed the Jesuits as tyrannical and deserving of every suspicion.³ Others have portrayed them in a hyperbolic saintly or heroic manner. Propaganda which has been distributed throughout Jesuit history from both ends of this spectrum has helped create many myths which have blurred the line between fact and fiction. A few have made the argument that Clavigero and others are precursors of an independent Mexico and "padres y maestros de la Mexicanidad".⁴

There is significant confusion through out the literature regarding the events surrounding the Jesuit expulsion and what influence it had on Mexican culture. On the part of the Jesuits, the type of work being done by them in Mexico and the nature of their interactions with Native Mexicans made them an influential part of society. The expulsion of the Jesuits had an indirect effect which was not foreseen by royal Spain. The ties they had with the people of New Spain were very real, and many were naturally outraged at what some viewed as a great injustice. Jesuits were, by 1767, an important part of society. This is a consequence of both their dominant role in education and the many missions that had been established to serve the native population.

The founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius Loyola, began an order which was modeled more on his military experience than on the paradigm of the orders of that time. His elder brothers were killed in battle and he himself was injured in battle. On Monday, May 20, 1521, while leading resistance to a French attack, he was hit by a cannonball fracturing his right leg.⁵ Later Ignatius formed a group known as the Gray Habits while enrolled at the University of Alcala in Barcelona. One of their early vows was to teach the young and the poor, however, the vow which has caused controversy over the years was the promise of special obedience to the Supreme Pontiff. In the year 1540, Pope Paul III signed a papal bull approving the order.⁶ Early on, Loyola turned away from fasting and secluded prayer stating that his Christian soldiers had to be fit to wage its campaigns. This philosophy of staying fit and being of very sound mind may have played an important role in them being able to work in the harshest of environments.

The first fifteen Jesuits arrived at the port of Vera Cruz, Mexico on June 1572. Within a few years they had already founded colleges in Guadalajara, Valladolid (Morelia), and Puebla. It can be said that their influence in the field of education was officially recognized in 1752 when the royal and pontifical University of Mexico City acknowledged Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, a Jesuit, as its patron by a public oath of allegiance. Although the Jesuits had been playing a central role in education for some time, this action helped acknowledged the fact that the Jesuits had forged ahead of the Dominicans and Franciscans in higher education. The Jesuits had come to Mexico to evangelize and to educate. To educate is a duty

which is deeply ingrained in the order of the Society of Jesus. In Mexico they educated always with compassion for the poor, and educated both the Spanish and natives. They were also an influence on the Catholic Church in Mexico and in the period from 1660 to 1767 the Jesuits were at the forefront of popularizing the apparition devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe. The image of the Virgen de Guadalupe would eventually become a powerful symbol that Miguel Hidalgo would eventually take up to attract and hold native and Mestizo supporters.

Although there is debate as to the extent of their influence, it is clear the Jesuits had a significant amount. By the time of their expulsion the Jesuits played a dominant role in education, and their missions among the natives were numerous and well organized. They gathered natives in permanent mission villages called reducciones. These were communities where the natives were gathered together in order for there to be a more efficient and effective administration of them. The theory here was that it was an efficient way to "lead the Indian back" from its savage state into a community where he could learn Christian belief and how to live in Spanish society. Jesuits wanted to manage these missions without interference from the outside, but this conflicted with the colonist demand for native labor. A system in which Natives Mexicans were obligated to perform work for their encomenderos was systematically opposed by the Jesuits. This of course must have caused resentment on the part of those who saw the native population as an endless supply of cheap (or free) labor.

By 1767 the Jesuits had 678 members, over one hundred missions, and the best schools which included twenty-three colleges and various seminaries. One of the reasons why Jesuits were so successful is that they had a very good system of administration. This allowed them to keep everything working properly. They had many rules and regulations to follow concerning most of their economic and social affairs. Although many of the Jesuit missions flourished while seemingly isolated and at a great distance from any main Jesuit center, these were "intimately woven into the fabric of religious and civil control." 14

Cabredo's Code was the first code of rules for the governing of missions and was approved in 1610.¹⁵ In this code was expressed a desire to maintain cooperative measures with the Native Mexicans and the Spaniards for the greater good of all. It also reinforced the importance which the native population represented in their work. They were not here to convert or educate the Spanish, but to concentrate on bringing the native population closer to Christ through their education in these missions. Though Jesuits can be criticized as denying natives their freedom by keeping them in these camps, the uprisings which resulted from their expulsion give insight into how the native population regarded the Jesuits. The Jesuits were never to minister to the Spanish at the expense of the primary ministry to natives. This the code protected by maintaining that labor was not a free market open to Spaniards. ¹⁶ Jesuits were both teachers and protectors to the

native population in Mexico at a time when many were seen as a source of labor rather than brothers in Christ.

It is generally believed that a major reason for the expulsion is that the Jesuits were very economically successful and dominated education, thus holding significant social influence. The belief Jesuits held that the Church's authority overshadowed secular authority was ideologically opposed to the political ideologies of the time and naturally led to their own destruction. Secular political leaders had different priorities than that of the Jesuits. It is easy to see how they may have perceived them as a threat and would benefit from the dismantlement of their order. Some in the Mexican political arena, who were considered liberals, viewed the church as an economic parasite which drained resources. Its influence (esp. Jesuit) made them politically dangerous. The manner in which the expulsion took place was extraordinary and brings up many questions regarding motives. It can be surmised that because of the Jesuit influence in society, royal Spain was very concerned over who the Jesuits where ultimately loyal to.

New Spain had never had a standing militia; however, in the mid 1760's a standing army was created to protect this territory. Some believe that although its long term objective was to secure the territory, its short term objective was to help carry out the secret order to expel all Jesuits from New Spain. 19 The expulsion of the Jesuits from New Spain occurred in a very secretive way, and the reasons for doing so are ultimately shadowed in a veil of mystery. The action was unprecedented. Never before had an order of expulsion on such a grand scale and executed in a simultaneous manner across a vast territory been carried out before. In Spanish Mexico, the orders were written and known of by only three people in order to assure that it would be kept secret. These orders were dispatched in a way which allowed for it to be carried out in all of Mexico simultaneously. They had obviously taken great care to avoid conflict; however, there were uprisings in places like Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi, Patzuaro, and Valladolid. Although there was resistance to the expulsion, the great majority of the Jesuits peacefully submitted, and in some cases helped calm insurgents. In a rare case, a Jesuit priest was accused of being the cause of a native uprising in Sonora.²⁰ Another important thing to note is that not all the insurgents were Native Mexicans.

In Mexico it was the Viceroy Marquis de Croix who first received the order from royal Spain. He had been in Mexico for only nine months and had already grown concerned of the potential power the Jesuits held over the people. He feared and anticipated that the execution of this royal order would cause turmoil and that the Jesuits may resist expulsion. It is believed that this is one of the reasons why he only informed two others, his nephew Teodoro de Croix and Jose de Galvez. The rest of the inhabitants of Mexico were to discover the plan on the morning of June 25, 1767.²¹

Jose de Galvez was in charge of suppressing the uprisings and he did so using brutal force and intimidation. Ninety alleged leaders were executed, over six hundred rebels were sentenced to life in prison, and another hundred were exiled.²² There were those who criticized Galvez's suppression and his use of brutal force. Pedro de Rada, secretary of the viceroyalty who was secretly commissioned to report on the activities of Galvez, condemned the wholesale punishments of the natives.²³

At San Luis de la Paz, northeast of Guanajuato, the commissioners of the expulsion had been driven out without having executed their orders. Here four were executed and two others whipped and exiled. The Jesuit priests are said to have helped calm the disruption of the natives, telling them the order of expulsion had to be obeyed.²⁴ At San Luis Potosi there was disruption started by the local natives, which had caused the Jesuits to remain in the church. It was not until the 24th of July that Galvez was able to march in and execute the order.²⁵ After Galvez marched in and took control of the situation, eleven "rioters" were hung and their heads set on pikes, thirty-nine others received life sentences and five were exiled. The leader of another revolt in San Nicolas was also executed for having sworn not to lay down arms until they had done away with all Gachupines, or Spaniards. Here the whole town was seen as accessory to the uprising. In Guadalcazar four more were executed. At San Francisco the natives had been encouraged to revolt by a Jesuit and here eight natives were executed and seven received life sentences. ²⁶

In Lower California the order was delayed. This was not because of an uprising but because of the fact that the area was rather inaccessible. The first Iesuits to arrive in Lower California were Fathers Eusebio Kino and Matias Goni in 1683.27 This was only after several failed attempts to occupy this remote land. Clavigero has an account of the expulsion from Lower California. This account illustrates the emotions that may have gone along with not only this case but also in other areas of New Spain. The expulsion of the Jesuits was felt by the people they served. When those who were sent as representatives of royal Spain reached the Jesuits, they "respectfully submitted" to the King's decree. Clavigero writes that the Jesuit priests were ordered to command their "neophytes" in their last sermon "to remain quiet and loyal during their coming absence and obey their replacements." He goes on to say, "the neophytes saw those, who had introduced them to the Christian way of life leave, [and] had become greatly attached to them; they wept uncontrollably, and the missionaries looking at their dear sons in Christ...whom they now had to abandon in a state of affliction, could hardly restrain their tears. As they were about to embark, the soldiers, including those accompanying the new governor, fell on their knees and kissed the Jesuits' feet, bathing them with their tears..."28 Clavigero also notes that the Franciscans who had been sent to replace the Jesuits soon abandoned their missions saying "the country was inhabitable and that the Jesuits should be grateful to the King for having extricated them from horrible misery."29

This story highlights the sacrifice which Jesuits were willing to make in order to serve the native population.³⁰ Here we can see the militant philosophy of Loyola at work, although the word militant may give the wrong impression. These Jesuits were not militant in the sense that they took up arms, but in the sense that they had been conditioned to endure the hardships which inherently goes along with missionary work. The native population, which these missionaries worked with, must have seen the hardships which Jesuits endured in order to better serve them. One can understand why so many natives suffered an immediate sense of great loss at the thought of having these men taken away. In the case of Lower California (at least for some time) there was no one willing to continue what the Jesuits had begun, and the natives of this region were abandoned for the time being.

Some contend that in general there was no opposition to the expulsion;³¹ however I would argue the evidence is clear that the uprisings were significant. One wonders what would have happened had Croix not taken such great, and unprecedented, steps to prevent disruptions.

It is important to note that although all these disturbances coincided with the Jesuit expulsion, it is also believed that many were not entirely due to the Jesuit expulsion. At that time there had also been a renewal of orders against the general population such as prohibition against carrying of arms. Many may have also been in protest against the recent organization of a militia and the consequent collection of taxes. Jose de Galvez was originally sent to Mexico by the Spanish King, Charles III, to carry out reforms of local government [visitas] which began in 1765. The "visitas" of Galvez introduced a standing militia with its dreaded leva or conscription, greater control of tithes paid to the Church, and increased taxation.³² The disorder and rebellion was not confined to natives. The commercial class was upset on account of falling profits, mine-owners feared loss because of rebel natives, and the clergy was distressed by loss of benefices and influence. American born Spaniards were also upset. They felt a lack of opportunity and were kept out of the affairs of the state because of their birth.³³ There seems to have been a culmination of resentment felt toward royal Spain on the part of many of the inhabitants of New Spain. The expulsion, which was widespread and felt simultaneously throughout the territory, may have had the unexpected effect of burgeoning suspicions toward the crown.

It should also be noted that native revolts were not something new. Similar episodes had taken place throughout the history of New Spain. Native rebellions were not uncommon; however, there are aspects about the expulsion which make these particular events and rebellions distinctive.

The manner in which the expulsion was carried out was meticulous and designed for maximum effectiveness. Viceroy Marquis de Croix only informed his nephew Teodoro de Croix and Jose de Galvez about the order from royal Spain, and this information was kept secret until the morning of its execution. Even more

astonishing is the fact that the event was carried out simultaneously across the territory. This was accomplished by sending out sealed orders throughout the territory that were only to be opened at a specific date and time. Although the execution of the expulsion was well thought out, it may have served to further alienate royal Spain. This was a uniting event as all the inhabitants of the territory experienced it at the same time. The manner in which the expulsion was conducted may also have fed the growing suspicions felt by American Spaniards or criollos (who were seen by many Spaniards as second-class citizens) against the Crown.

Another incredible feat was the swift and brutal manner in which these uprisings were dealt with by Galvez. In less than a month hostility was quelled, and most participants had been dealt with. ³⁴ This was achieved at the cost of many lives that were executed, sentenced to a lifetime in prison, or exiled. The brutality involved, which included public dismemberments, hangings, and severed heads left displayed on pikes, made these events memorable in the hearts of those involved. The manner in which royal Spain used these brutal acts to intimidate all to submit to the Crown must have weighed heavily on those who witnessed these atrocities.

Apart from the simultaneous rebellions and uprisings, many felt an ensuing sense of loss as Jesuits were an integral part of many lives. Pain was felt by multitudes across the Mexican territory as these teachers, leaders, and protectors were ripped from their homes condemned to a life in exile. The violent nature in which Galvez operated created martyrs. This helped to link those involved and may represent the sowing of the original seeds that were leading to the more serious revolts to come. These affairs in Mexico were even then ripening for the developments of a generation later.³⁵

In exile the Mexican Jesuits played a very different role in their inspiration of a Mexican national spirit. Here they exerted influence through their writings. While in exile they wrote on themes dealing with Mexico and Mexican history. Andres Cavo and Pedro Jose Marquez are very important writers, but the most significant exile was Francisco Javier Clavigero. His book on ancient Mexico is regarded as a seminal work in Mexican nationalism.³⁶

There were many myths and misconceptions about New Spain and its native inhabitants. At that time Europe had many false ideas concerning the Americas as a whole. Many were surprised to find that these Jesuits, born is the Americas, were learned men. Books were not thought to have existed across the sea in New Spain. These Jesuits, most of whom were born in Mexico, no doubt longed for their home. They must have felt a devastating attachment to Mexico, a home they would never see again. Upon reaching Europe they found that the available literature regarding the New World was misleading and erroneous. The Jesuits, in exile, decided to take "up their pens, like true literary crusaders, to give battle to such distortions".

Francisco Javier Clavigero was born in Vera Cruz. His father Blas was high on the social ladder, educated in Paris and born in Europe. ³⁸ Clavigero entered

the Jesuit Novitiate at Tepotzotlan on February 13, 1748. There the young seventeen-year-old met fellow novice Francisco Javier Alegre. Alegre is known for his massive multi-volume work on Jesuit history in New Spain to the time of the expulsion. As a novice Clavigero developed an interest in missionary work among the Mexican Natives and learned Nahuatl, as did all Jesuit novices during this time.³⁹ He was educated at a time when there was great anxiety. During this time, it was feared that many of the new teachings and philosophies would corrupt Christian belief; however, he and his colleagues felt that a good Jesuit cannot be ignorant about the new philosophies which were being discussed around the world. They felt that the Church's teaching had to be based on solid intellectual foundations if they were to win over rational men.⁴⁰ Noticing the enlightened currents in Europe, they set out to bring modern philosophy into New Spain. The expulsion cut their efforts short.

Concerning the Nahuatl language, Clavigero defends this language from its criticisms. He states that the Nahuatl language may be somewhat lacking when it comes to concepts concerning materials, substances, and accidents; however, languages in Asia and Europe were also lacking these concepts until Greeks began to form abstract ideas and language to express them. He praises the fact that Nahuatl does contain many words which can express metaphysical concepts and morals. This fact allowed him to, very easily, express in Nahuatl the mysteries of his religion.⁴¹

Clavigero was a very gifted intellectual, but what he enjoyed most was working with the natives. He was appalled at the fact that after spending five years as a missionary he was asked to again work as a teacher. His interest in culture and history led him to collect many manuscripts and pieces of information about the ancient Mexican world. This eventually led him to write the "Historia Antigua de Mexico".

Clavigero begins "Historia Antigua de Mexico" by stating that his book is a history of Mexico written by a Mexican. In the letter at the beginning of this book he laments that a certain professor of antiquities is no longer at the University and worries that in his absence, there would be no one left who would understand the meaning of the relics of ancient Mexico. Clavigero calls on the University to collect anything which it can find regarding ancient Mexico in a Museum, where they may be studied before they are tragically lost. This letter illustrates the fact that he holds the things of ancient Mexico dear to his heart. He gave the study of Mexico's pre-Hispanic past a great gift by helping collect much of the primary source material which was scattered throughout New Spain.

Clavigero identifies himself as a Mexican yet throughout the book he applies this term only to the natives of ancient Mexico. Another interesting aspect is that he differentiates between the Natives (which he calls Mexicans) and Spaniards. ⁴⁵ Clavigero rooted himself in the Aztec past and helped create an identity which was unique to Mexicans. His history of ancient Mexico ends with Cortez's triumph

over the Aztec empire and destruction of Tenochtitlan. This he compares to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. The Mexicans [ancient Aztecs] were abandoned to misery, oppression, and indifference. He feels that because of ancient Mexico's injustice, cruelty, and the ancestor's superstitions, this was a horrendous case of divine justice. The national literature of Mexico can be said to have its roots in the pre-Colombian period. Mexican scholars proudly reproduce what remains and regard the great Maya and Nahuatl literatures as part of their own inheritance. The Roman Ro

The connection to Aztec and Mesoamerican antiquity that exists in the Mexican cultural spirit is unique when compared to the United States of America. In an article by James D. Drake a comparison is made between Jefferson's book, "Notes of the State of Virginia" and Clavigero's "Historia Antigua de Mexico". When one compares America and Mexico there is a very different philosophy concerning natives. Whereas Jefferson discusses Native Americans in the present, Clavigero devoted over half of his work to their pre-conquest history. By adopting historical roots in the pre-conquest Aztec world, he implicitly makes the natives part of his community rather than the conquistadors. The was the shift from the mendicant to the creole awareness of pre-Hispanic civilization during the course of the seventeenth century which initiated a new phase in the evolution of Mexicanism. Bernabe Navarro Barajas felt that Jesuits like Francisco Javier Clavigero, Francisco Javier Alegre, and Andres Cavo were certainly those who contributed most to establishing an ideological basis for emancipation. This influence, although very significant, was subtle.

At no time did a Mexican Jesuit exile take an active part to promote the independence of Mexico. These were not revolutionaries; however, the effects of the Jesuit expulsion in this regard are noteworthy. What was left in the hearts of many was a sense of resentment and suspicion toward the Crown which simmered.

Miguel Hidalgo first studied with Jesuits in Valladolid and was fourteen years old when Galvez came to his city to enforce the order of expulsion. ⁵² Clavigero was in Guadalajara when Hidalgo was studying in Valladolid, so the two never met. Still, Clavigero's writing was something which Miguel Hidalgo was familiar with, and his "Historia Antigua de Mexico" was part of his collection of books. ⁵³

Historia Antigua was not well received. It was not published in Spanish until well after Clavigero's death. A royal order was sent to the Council of Indies on September 21, 1784 to examine Clavigero's writings. The king was given to understand that some of the content was "not in conformity with historical truth, it was derogatory to the honor of Spain, and hostile to a just and glorious conquest." Clavigero's Spanish translation was not published until 1945; however, in 1853 Francisco Pablo Vazquez made a Spanish translation from the Italian original. 55

Clavigero writes of the expulsion in a letter he wrote in exile just before his death. He wonders if Jesuits of times past will be remembered. He asks if their destruction is permanent in the "age of cabala and the abatement of Jansenists" and

whether people will ever realize the illegitimacy, the injustice, and the cruelty that took part. He is haunted by the incessant question of why and wonders whether the truth behind the expulsion will forever be censored.⁵⁶

Mexicanismo, or the Mexican National Spirit, embraces its ties to Mesoamerican ancestry. The Mexican flag is a powerful example of this ancient influence. There is a pride in its indigenous roots. The Mexican Jesuits influence in society, and the events surrounding their expulsion in 1767, planted some of the original seeds that led to the unfolding of history that came together to create the Mexican national spirit. Mexicanismo.

Endnotes

- 1 Francisco Ortiz Jr. is a life-long resident of the Rio Grande Valley. He received a B.A. in Anthropology and a M.A. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Texas-Pan American. He is currently a full-time Psychology Instructor at South Texas College.
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- 3 Edward John Boyd Barrett. *The Jesuit Enigma*. (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), viii.- This book by Barrett is an interesting read because Barrett is a former Jesuit who is not writing of them in the best of intentions. Although he states that it is a balanced look at the Society, he also states that he hopes "The sad and tragic holocaust of fine young men, the continual sacrifice, that from generation to generation is offered on the altar of Jesuitism, can be at least diminished as a result of my story."
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 - 24 Trueba, 42.
 - 25 Ibid, 47.
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- 27 Francis J. Weber. *Jesuit Mission in Baja California*. (The Americas, Vol. 23, No. 4, Apr. 1967) 410.
- 28 Francisco Javier Clavigero. *Historia de la Antigua o Baja California-History of Ancient and Lower California*. Trans. and ed. by Felix Jay (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) 388.
 - 29 Ibid., 389.
- 30 Barrett, 208- A view as to how the Jesuits gained power is given by ex-Jesuit Barrett states that the Jesuits were powerful and wealthy because of assiduously spread suggestion. He states that they spread word that they "were super-men, paragons of learning, workers of miracles, disguised angels from heaven... Needless to say it was easy for Jesuits to work miracles and to achieve wonders when their path was everywhere prepared by such strong suggestion." It was obviously very difficult for the Jesuits in Lower California, and there is no doubt that they endured great sacrifice to serve the Indians of this area.
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 - 32 Poole, 171.
 - 33 Priestly, 232.
 - 34 Lafaye, 100.

- 35 Priestly, 233.
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 - 39 Ronan, 1977: 12-14.
 - 40 Ronan, 1977: 18-19.
- 41 Francisco Javier Clavigero. *Capitulos de Historia y Disertaciones*. (Ediciones de la UNAM, 1944) 135.
 - 42 Ronan, 1977: 39
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- 48 James D. Drake. *Appropriating a Continent: Geographical Categories, Scientific Metaphors, and the Construction of Nationalism in British North America and Mexico.* (Journal of World History, Vol. 15, No. 3, Sept. 2004) 13.
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 - 52 Morner, 163.
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