PREFACE

Between 1848 and 1900, a generous lifetime for men of the nineteenth century, the Spanish-speaking peoples of the southwestern United States changed from a Mexican frontier society into an ethnic group marginal to both Mexican and Anglo-American cultures. The main theme of this work is the economic, familial, societal, and geopolitical metamorphosis of this unique Spanish-language culture. How did the new ethnic group evolve?

In attempting to answer this question, writers and scholars have suggested that racial discrimination, cultural oppression, and outright violence have been major forces molding the Mexican-American experience. While partially concurring in this view, I would add that since the late nineteenth century, Mexican-American history has also been characterized by creative and constructive responses to changing circumstances.

After the Mexican-American War of 1848, the most rapid modifications in the frontier Mexican way of life occurred in the towns. Here, thousands of displaced Mexicans met the most brutal as well as the most progressive aspects of the new Anglo-American order. Rural Mexican culture in the Southwest changed slowly in the decades after 1848. In Arizona and New Mexico, rural life continued as it had before the war. Anglo encroachments took decades to diminish the numbers who lived on the land. The ranchos and farms

of Southern California, where the majority of California Mexicans lived, were for some time isolated from the thousands of gold-seekers who inundated the North.

In 1850, Los Angeles, California, was the largest Mexican town in the United States. By 1880 it had become an American city, and the Spanish-speaking residents of the original pueblo found themselves living in a barrio called Sonora Town. Thus I have chosen to study the dynamics of change in the pueblo of Los Angeles.

No one has yet studied the history of how the ethnic community of Sonora Town came into existence, or the changing nature of its social composition and culture. Leonard Pitt and a few others have discussed the Mexicans of Los Angeles as part of larger studies, but most histories of early Los Angeles give little attention to the Mexican-Americans living there. I hope that the present study will enlighten those who seek the historical origins of the urban Chicano, be of value to those who are concerned with the effects of modernization on traditional societies, and help to inform those who are attempting to improve contemporary social conditions.

Leonard Pitt's *The Decline of the Californios* was the original inspiration for this project. His well-documented and original interpretations of the economic and social decline of the *hacendados* prompted me to attempt this social history of the thousands of laborers and semi-skilled workers who constituted the mass of the Spanish-speaking population.

The methodology of the New Urban History, particularly the quantitatively based work of Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, shaped this study. It was from them that I first learned of the possibility of "doing history from the bottom up." Almost all of the quantitative studies published to date have been concerned with communities east of the Mississippi. Perhaps this book will be followed by others that focus

on the minorities of the American Southwest. The anthropologist Octavio Romano-V. has urged historians and social scientists to look at "traditional" Chicano culture from a more dynamic point of view. I share his concern that Mexican-Americans should be regarded as actively participating in the shaping of their history and culture.

I am grateful to the many people and institutions who contributed their time and effort in the shaping of this book. Richard Weiss, Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles, was instrumental in encouraging me to begin my research when I was a doctoral candidate there. He, along with Professors Gary Nash and Melvin Pollner, offered valuable suggestions at various points in the first-draft stage. Professors James Wilkie and Oscar Martínez reviewed the completed manuscript and proposed thematic and structural changes. Welcome criticism and encouragement came from Professor Leonard Pitt, who took time from a busy schedule to read the entire work. Professor David Weber, my former colleague at San Diego State University, gave a close scrutiny to Chapter 1, thereby improving its historical accuracy. Of course, even after all the correction and criticism, errors are bound to remain, and they are my full responsibility.

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