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Chapter 1 & 2 Analysis

Chapter 1

This chapter begins by introducing the meaning of the term Mexican American. Gonzales mentions that in order to understand the history of the Mexican Americans in the United States, it is important to go back in time to the invasion of the Mexica land by the Spaniards. After the conquest of the New World, the Spaniard initiated contact with the indigenous people of Mexico, and that's how the birth of the Mexican community began in the United States. It is important to recall, that by this period of time, Mexico (Aztlán), was composed of some southern states of recent U.S.

Gonzales mentions that the Spaniards are a result of multiple cultures. He also explains how the Spaniards obtained their name. According to Gonzales, the history of the Spanish people can be traced back to when the natives of the Iberian Peninsula began to leave clues of an existing culture. Like any other undeveloped country, it attracted other people, such as the Celts, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and most importantly the Romans. The Romans named the Iberian Peninsula *Hispania*. They had acquired this piece of land as a prize in 202 BCE, towards the end of the Second Punic War against the Carthage. The chapter continues on to explain the history of Spain, from the invasion of the Moors in 711 to the expeditions of Christopher Columbus on the infamous ships, *La Niña, la Pinta, y la Santa Maria*.

Furthermore, the chapter then begins to introduce the “Amerindians”. One of the ideas from this chapter that caught my attention was the use of the term “Amerindians” to relate to Native Indigenous people. The term Indian has been controversial for several years; it was first introduced by Columbus, when mistaking the Americas with Las Indias. Therefore, the term Indian was applied to the Natives of that land. Although some people still use the term Indian, it is preferably to acknowledge them as Native American or Indigenous. Before the Europeans first

arrived to the Americas, there were many civilizations of Natives already living there. Two main large centers housing these groups were the Andean altiplano and Mesoamerica. In the last section of chapter one, Gonzales then decides to go into the topic of the Conquest of the Mexica land.

I strongly believe this last section is the most important part of the chapter; the conquest of Mexico. Like in many stories, there always two sides to it. In this case, the Spaniards told the story from their own experiences, rather than trying to understand that that was simply the way of living of the uncivilized, savage, and horrific people they conquered. On the other hand, I suggest that the Mexica people did not see this conquest as a form of colonization, instead, they might had seen the massacre of their people and the destruction of their precious city, as a form of jealousy, envy, and selfishness. It is important to mention that the conquest of Tenochtitlan would have not been possible without the help of the thousands of Indigenous allies the Spaniards had acquired. From the Tlaxcaltecas to the Cholulans, the Spaniards knew that the best and easier way to destroy the most powerful civilization of Mesoamerica was to become friends with their enemies.

After the conquest of the New World, the Spanish rule the Mexica land for several years and called it New Spain. *Mestizaje* was then introduced and thousands and thousands of mestizos populated New Spain. Along with their new customs and traditions, the Spanish prohibited any type of Indigenous traditions and forced the Natives to convert to Christianity and the rest is history.

Overall, this chapter was interesting because I was able to understand how the Spaniard came to be the people that they were back in time. It kind of feels like the Spaniards were reenacting a piece of their own experiences with the Romans, instead this time the Spaniards were playing the role of the Romans. I found it helpful to have read about the history of the Spaniards, I honestly never paid attention to even read or research about their past. Perhaps, I was too prideful to realize that they had conquest and destroyed a land that was very rich in culture and traditions, and mainly to have had murdered thousands of Indigenous people, people that I personally identify with. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that because of these

events, we, Mexican Americans, are now here in the U.S., being the fastest growing population in the United States ever since the 70's.

Chapter 2

After the Conquest of the Aztecs and the destruction of Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards moved out in all directions, looking for mostly gold, which was the main reason that led them to the New World. In the north however, the Europeans were not interested in any gold, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and his men arrived to shores of Texas by luck. According to Gonzales, this was the first appearance of whites and the first black in North America.

Just like in the South, Cabeza de Vaca and his men were amazed by the exotic people and the precious surroundings. This section of the chapter continues to explain the many explorations happening in the North. This time of period was known as the Age of Exploration. The explorers discovered places such as California, Arkansas, Mississippi, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, etc. Nevertheless, the explorations were discouraged due to failure to find the Golden Cities in the North. However, new discoveries of silver in the northwest of Mexico led the expeditions there, later two new expeditions ventured to New Mexico.

The settlement in New Mexico was only possible because of the threats, true and untrue, imposed by the European interlopers in the northern region. During this period of time, the Europeans had initiated a great number of raids on Spanish ships and had decided to attack the leading city in South America, Lima. Nevertheless, it seemed like the Spanish had overcome the attack and later arrived in New Mexico in the 16th century.

Over the years, I had never learned that the Spanish also had settled up in the Northern regions. I always thought they had only settled in Mexico and South America. It is interesting to find out that the Spaniards also spread through the north and tried to implement their customs and beliefs on the Indigenous tribes of the North. Although many tribes were destroyed by them, many managed to survive the new lifestyle.

I now know that the Spanish and other Europeans had settled in what we know today as the United States of America. The settlement in the coastal region of California left evidence of

Spanish expansion to the north. Missions were built in several regions of the states; San Jose, Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterrey, San Francisco, etc. Life in the North was very different from that in the south. Women often worked outside the home as curanderas and parteras, and many were allowed to drink, smoke, and gamble. Another aspect that seemed to be different in the frontier was the difference in social class. Although racial status continued to be noticeable, there was hardly a tight correlation among color and class. Due to scarcity of labor, social mobility was increasing and therefore, acquisition of the land was easy.

Later on, the chapter begins to mention about racial mixing and mestizaje in the Northern region. Mestizaje was the mixture of indigenous blood and white European blood. In the end of the 18th century, it is estimated that the majority of the inhabitants were mestizos. It is safe to say that by the end of the Spanish colonial period racial mixture had occurred in most of the Northern frontier compared to central Mexico, where most of its inhabitants were mixed blood. On the other hand, Spanish settlement in the northern frontiers led to the extermination of many Indigenous tribes.

It is mentioned in this chapter, that the Spanish exploited the Natives of the region, believed that to have instituted slavery. They also adopted a policy of extermination against nomadic tribes and although miscegenation was widespread and was a sign of positive attitude and tolerance, ultimately, the choice given to Native Americans on the frontier was either life on a reservation or death. It is safe to say that the life of the Indigenous and the Spanish in the Far North and life in central Mexico was similar yet more beneficial to compare. The hard work and dedication that took to establish such foundations in these regions was only possible by the strengths of the men and women who suffered all along. I believe it is important to mention that the Spaniards would not have been able to expand and flourish without the contribution of the hundreds of Indigenous people that were forced into a new form of living.