Let's Disagree to Agree: Angélico Chávez Reads Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

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Willa Cather scarcely needs an introduction. By the 1920's her work had placed her in the pantheon of American writers, and while contemporary critics such as H.L. Mencken succeeded in demoting her to a secondary tier (O'Brien), she remains a major literary figure and the subject of ongoing study. In her letters, Cather revealed that she considered *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) to be her best novel. Certainly it was the novel that marked the height of her critical success, even if it was outsold by her subsequent work, *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), which ran in Knopf's Book of the Month Club.

Amid the acclaim for *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* however, there are a few dissenting voices, notably from those closest to the novel's subject. These dissenters readily acknowledge the novel's artistic worth, but object strongly to its negative depiction of New Mexican priest Antonio José Martínez, who plays the foil to Cather's title character, the admirable Jean-Marie Latour. In order to set the record straight, one New Mexico historian produced both a book of essays and a play.[1] As Steele and Weinberg note, the debate surrounding "her highly imaginative fiction continues to echo raucously in the halls of history" (475).

Attempts to correct Cather's misrepresentation emerge generally from within the context of Chicano revisionist historiography of the 1960s and 70s. This revisionism pushes back against the dominant Anglo-American narrative of the Southwest, which holds that, prior to annexation by the United States, the land was mostly empty and entirely mismanaged by corrupt and backwards Mexicans. The U.S. takeover of the Hispanic Southwest was portrayed as part of the progressive, civilizing movement of the nation's "manifest destiny." Chicano historians have worked to correct this narrative, and have shown that the history of the region is one of military takeover, colonialism, and wholesale land theft.[2]

Chicano historiography has its own history, however, and includes internal variations that range from assimilationism to ethnic nationalism. Similarly, the borders of Chicano identity (not to mention Chicano Studies) are disputed territory and full of incongruities. Prominent writers like

Richard Rodríguez have rejected the Chicano label and its associated ethnonationalist politics. Subsequently, Rodríguez has been rejected by some elements within the movement, even as others still consider him "Chicano" by virtue of parentage and culture and therefore continue to include him in Chicano anthologies and readers. *Chicanismo* (the identity and ideology associated with the Chicano Movement), has likewise been challenged, not only by self-proclaimed "outsiders" like Rodríguez but also by "insiders" like Gloria Anzaldúa, for its problematic history of gender inequality and homophobia. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has criticized Anzaldúa and, by proxy, *Chicanismo*, for appropriating indigenous identity in ways which threaten the autonomy of existing indigenous groups. This last theme is one I will return to in light of the following discussion of Cather and Angélico Chávez, another writer sometimes placed under the Chicano rubric.

Angélico Chávez was a New Mexican poet, archivist, and historian. Like the Padre Martínez treated by Cather, Chávez was a Franciscan priest. Chávez's work, like that of revisionist Chicano historians, attempts to vindicate Hispanic culture, rescuing it from Anglo-American chauvinism and erasure. This resistance to Anglo supremacy is seen most clearly in Chávez's trilogy of biographies of Hispanic ecclesiastical leaders, including Padre Martínez. Unlike the main body of Chicano scholars and activists, however, Chávez does not rely on a cultural identification with indigenous groups. He does construct his own origin myth and Hispanic homeland, but "Aztlán" is absent from his work.

Chávez draws from a different set of mythohistorical identifications—with Spain. The "Spanish Myth," which I will outline subsequently, emerges from some of the same social pressures that produced the Chicano movement, yet has a different political valence and a greater purchase in New Mexico than in other parts of the Southwest, due to historical factors.[3] Chávez's Spanish Myth shares many of Cather's presuppositions in *Death Comes,* yet this underlying agreement appears, initially, in the form of a dispute.

Near the end of his semi-historical *My Penitente Land: Reflections on Spanish New Mexico* (1974), Angélico Chávez makes some remarks about Cather's novel. First, he indicates his general approval of the way it captures New Mexico's atmosphere: "Willa Cather beautifully delineates the person of Lamy against this very landscape, particularly the backdrop provided by the Sangre de Cristo. It is a fine romantic picture of a great and good man upon the strange beauty of a land that she appreciates" (258). Yet despite his admiration for the way Cather weaves landscape and historical personages into a religiously symbolic narrative, Chávez immediately objects to other aspects of the work: "As a foil to her hero, and to highlight his virtues and those of the French culture which he and his helpers brought along, the author makes a lecherous ogre of native Padre Martínez of Taos"

(258). Cather employs Martínez as a synecdoche for New Mexican culture, which she sees as inferior and backwards despite her positive portrayals of a few minor New Mexican characters. *Death Comes* portrays New Mexico through the eyes of Jean Marie Latour, a fictionalized version of Jean-Baptiste Lamy, a French parish priest who had worked previously in Ohio. This perspective allows New Mexico to be compared with both French and Anglo-American civilization. The contrasts that emerge are generally unfavorable to New Mexico and its inhabitants. The racism implicit in this viewpoint is clear from the novel's outset, as the Norman (northern European) Cardinal is "full-belted and ruddy" (5), while the Venetian (southern European) is "spare and sallow and hook-nosed" (5). The Spanish Cardinal is "dark in colouring" (5), yet his physiognomy is redeemed somewhat through the influence of "his English mother" (5), to whom he owes his "fresh, pleasant English mouth" and "open manner" (5). Likewise, Latour's mission to New Mexico is understood as the cleansing of the Augean stable (7), a humiliating task rendered Herculean by undisciplined and lax Mexican priests (7), hostile Indians and horrifying terrain (8). The Cardinals agree that only a French priest is suitable for the job, for "they are the great organizers" (9).

Cather's novel narrates the trials and ultimate triumph of this organizational intelligence. Born in Rome, where the plans to send Latour to New Mexico were laid, this rational spirit claims something like a blood affinity with both Western Civilization and the Catholic Church. "One summer evening in the year 1848, three Cardinals and a missionary Bishop from America were dining together in the gardens of a villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome" (3). The year is significant: in addition to its revolutionary connotations in Europe, 1848 marks the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico ceded possession of New Mexico (and other northern territories) to the United States. Latour thus functions as agent and *adelantado* for both the burgeoning U.S. empire and the putatively superior culture to which France and the Roman Catholic Church also belong. *Death Comes* is, at its heart, the narrative of this culture's inevitable progress. Culture, as I use the term here in reference to Cather's work, should be understood as an index of civilizational superiority and moral virtue. It is also linked inseparably to race.

In her 1927 "Commonweal Letter," Cather writes:

> Archbishop Lamy, the first Bishop of New Mexico, had become a sort of invisible personal friend. I had heard a great many interesting stories about him from very old Mexicans and traders who still remembered him, and I never passed the life-size bronze of him which stands under a locust tree before the Cathedral in Santa Fé without wishing that I could learn more about a pioneer churchman who looked so

> well-bred and distinguished. In his pictures on felt the same thing, something fearless and fine and very, very well-bred — *something that spoke of race*. (*Willa Cather Scholarly Edition* 375; my emphasis)

Cather's ethnic chauvinism is on display throughout the novel as she refers to "thick-blooded Mexican half-breeds" (43) who are like "little children" (233-34) "who play . . . with their religion" (240) and otherwise behave like disobedient schoolboys (136). This prejudice echoes the notoriously racist 19th-century travel accounts by Anglo-Americans who took no steps to disguise their disdain for the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of Texas and New Mexico: "Through the centre of this unknown region, fully as large as New England, courses the Rio Grande which can more correctly be compared to the Congo than to the Nile the moment that the degraded, turbulent, ignorant, and superstitious character of its population comes under examination" (Bourke 594); "There are no people on the continent of America, whether civilized or uncivilized, with one or two exceptions, more miserable in condition or despicable in morals than the mongrel race inhabiting New Mexico" (Sage 72). Such travel narratives often appeared in popular East Coast magazines and were illustrated with sketches that depicted the untamed wilderness, adobe houses and general backwardness of the Mexican Far North. Cather's novel at times evokes the ethnic chauvinism, episodic structure and *costumbrismo* of these early accounts. The 1926 Knopf edition (which Cather had an important role in designing) even contains illustrations remarkably similar to those found in Bourke's "The American Congo" (published in Scribner's) and Brewerton's "Incidents of Travel in New Mexico" (published in Harper's). Beyond the evident racism at work in these narratives, however, there is an institutional or cultural critique levied at (New) Mexicans. In Cather's novel, this appears in the opposition to Latour's enlightened reforms, present most notably in the person of Martínez.

Latour, with his bowlegged sidekick Vaillant, appears on the New Mexican scene like the soft-spoken, yet tough heroes of Western films, a Lone Arranger who must sort out the mess that Indians and Mexicans have made.[4] One of the things the Frenchmen must reform is the Mexicans' diet, as the latter are clearly incapable of preparing food as sophisticated as the priests' own *haute cuisine*:

> "Think of it, *Blanchet*; in all this vast country between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean, there is probably not another human being who could make a soup like this."
>
> "Not unless he is a Frenchman," said Father Joseph. (44)

Vaillant, whose whiteness is reinforced by his sobriquet, insists on cooking his own food rather than leaving it to his Mexican hosts. (66) Latour "encourage[s] the Mexicans to add fruit to their starchy diet" (303). Vaillant must "instruct their Mexican housekeeper . . . in cookery" (227), and even wealthy Mexicans "do not know how to keep [wine] properly" (46).

According to Julia McCrossin, Cather associates French cuisine with culture and tradition while using the French priests to advance the idea that New Mexican diets (Hispanic and indigenous) are inferior: "In *Death Comes*, we do get a cooking lesson of a different sort: a lesson on how food can serve as a secret language of history and nation forming" (241). Further, there is a "secret discourse in *Death Comes* that marks most Hispanic men as fat in order to express fears of hybrid culture and miscegenation" (245). Starchy food and fat go hand in hand with disorderliness and sloth in Cather's negative portrayal of Mexicans in general and Padre Martínez in particular. All of these are taken as signs of the moral decline alluded to in the novel's opening pages: "This country…has been allowed to drift for nearly three hundred years. . . . The old mission churches are in ruins. The few priests are without guidance or discipline. They are lax in religious observance, and some of them live in open concubinage" (7).

When Latour arrives in Taos, he finds just such a situation, as Martínez has openly fathered numerous children. Moreover, the physical and moral contrast between Martínez and Latour (and by extension between Mexicans and northern Europeans) is stark. Cather's physical description of the Taos Padre is worth examining:

> Not much taller than the Bishop in reality, he gave the impression of being an enormous man. His broad high shoulders were like a bull buffalo's, his big head was set defiantly on a thick neck, and the full-cheeked, richly coloured, egg-shaped Spanish face—how vividly the Bishop remembered that face! It was so unusual that he would be glad to see it again; a high, narrow forehead, brilliant yellow eyes set deep in strong arches, and full, florid cheeks, —not blank areas of smooth flesh, as in Anglo-Saxon faces, but full of muscular activity, as quick to change with feeling as any of his features. His mouth was the very assertion of violent, uncurbed passions and tyrannical self-will; the full lips thrust out and taut, like the flesh of animals distended by fear or desire. (161)

Martínez is described here as a man of violent passions, unlike the more rational Anglos, whose faces are blank and expressionless, unmarred by lines of emotion. Martínez is bestial, instinctual: a buffalo whose flesh betrays his animal instincts. Contrast this with Latour (Lamy), whose "well-

schooled countenance did not change a shadow" (163) upon learning that Padre Martínez openly acknowledges having fathered a son.

Latour confronts the moral decay caused by Martínez's Hispanic incontinence, eventually prevailing despite considerable resistance from the Taos priest and his allies. Likewise, the Frenchmen find themselves, from the outset, reconfiguring the physical spaces of the diocese that, like the morals of native priests, they find in a shabby state. No sooner does Vaillant arrive at the episcopal residence in Santa Fe than he recruits carpenters to "put it in order" (38) and furnish it, to the extent possible, with (Anglo-)American comforts: a walnut desk and other pieces of furniture received from "Yankee traders and the military Commandant at Fort Marcy" (38). In the Bishop's study, books are placed carefully in recesses or on shelves (39), contrasting sharply with the scene in Taos: "The Padre's study table was sprinkled with snuff, and piled so high with books that they almost hid the crucifix hanging behind it. Books were heaped on chairs and tables all over the house,—and the books and the floors were deep in the dust of spring sandstorms" (164). Latour's fastidiousness transcends simple housekeeping, however. He establishes well-ordered gardens, both at his Santa Fe residence and his retirement estate near Tesuque. He feels compelled to make his mark on the land. Not even Vaillaint understands the Bishop's compulsion to build a cathedral so soon and according to such precise criteria (278), but Latour must fulfill the onomastic and genetic destiny laid out for him by Cather, according to whom "the Germans classify, but the French arrange. The French missionaries have a sense of proportion and rational adjustment" (10). Julie Williams makes the important observation that Latour represents a soft imperialism whose goal is "hybridization or peaceful cohabitation" and that Cather contrasts this with Spanish tyranny (19).

One thing is clear: beyond a general disapproval of the "progressive" U.S. government (7), Latour and his church are firmly allied with the Anglo-Americans: "The kindness of the American traders, and especially of the military officers at the Fort, commands more than a superficial loyalty. . . . The church can do more than the Fort to make these poor Mexicans 'good Americans'" (41). The priests see themselves, not merely as adjuncts to the American military mission (at that moment one of occupation and counterinsurgency), but its most effective executors.

In Cather's novel, Martínez is alleged to have orchestrated the assassination of Bent, the new American governor. If this weren't clear enough, Cather spells out both the padre's sentiments and her own estimation of him: "Naturally he hated the Americans. The American occupation meant the end of men like himself. He was a man of the old order, a son of Abiquiu, and his day was over" (175). "Men like himself" is at this point of the novel already understood to mean slovenly,

disordered, intemperate and immoral. According to Cather, the French and Americans possess all of the civilizational virtues that Mexicans like Martínez lack. This is not to say that her portrayal of Mexicans is universally negative. Some of them are redeemed in her eyes by their childlike simplicity and their religious tenacity. Others, like the rancher Antonio Olivares, find salvation in their acceptance of Euro-American values. Olivares has been Europeanized by his American wife, "a Kentucky girl who had grown up among her relatives in Louisiana" (200). Olivares is contrasted with Manuel Chávez, an Indian fighter and "Martínez man" who "hated to spend an evening among American uniforms" (211). Later in the story, when Vaillant goes to Denver to work in the mining camps, he discovers that rich Anglo businessmen are less charitable than the poor Mexicans (294). Nevertheless, the overall picture—in which civilization is a European and Anglo-American attribute—remains unaltered.

Before looking at Angélico Chávez' objections to this negative portrayal of Mexicans and his response to the charge of anti-Americanism, I'll briefly outline Cather's description of Taos itself as the epicenter of unrest. This description is of a piece with her portrayal of Padre Martínez and provides context for understanding how her views largely coincide with those of Chávez, notwithstanding his protests. Taos, which was the northernmost of the major Spanish colonies in New Mexico, has been the site of three major uprisings: the Pueblo Revolt (1680), the Chimayó Rebellion (1837), and the Taos Revolt (1847). In reality, the last two uprisings can be considered stages of a single, more generalized moment of unrest in Río Arriba. Cather makes much of Taos' centrality in order to portray its priest as perversely proud of this bloody history, the latest episode of which he orchestrated himself, according to some early historians of New Mexico. Chávez attributes this accusation on Ralph E. Twitchell (*But Time and Chance* 82). Twitchell was one of Cather's sources, and she repeats the charge in her novel. "Martínez referred carelessly to the Bent massacre as they rode along. He boasted that there had never been trouble afoot in New Mexico that wasn't started in Taos" (172). Likewise, even the historically remote Pueblo Revolt (1680) is said to be a taoseño initiative. "'Haven't I just told you that all the trouble there ever was in New Mexico originated in Taos?' boasted the Padre. 'Popé was born a San Juan Indian, but so was Napoleon a Corsican. He operated from Taos'" (173).

Cather's chronology of violence is important because it conflates seventeenth-century indigenous resistance (the Pueblo Revolt) to Spanish colonization with the nineteenth-century New Mexican response to two events: Mexican Independence and the Anglo-American rise to regional hegemony. Unlike the Pueblo Revolt, the nineteenth-century uprisings did not (as Chávez claims)

occur along an ethnic axis, even though ethnicity remains an important dimension of these events. This conflation is, perhaps, at the heart of Chávez's objections to Cather's account of Padre Martínez. In *My Penitente Land* (1974), Chávez asserts that Popé was not the leader of the Pueblo Revolt (182-183), a claim which sparked controversy among Pueblos but which gained little traction in academia (Carroll 219). As I will show, this is typical of Chávez's attempt to minimize indigenous elements of New Mexico's history and culture.

Chávez felt so strongly about correcting the record on Martínez that he went on to become his biographer. In 1981, he published *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martínez of Taos*. In the foreword, Chávez writes that Martínez was a "genius in many ways," one whom "neither his contemporary foes and partisans, nor his modern critics and admirers, ever fully understood." Although Cather receives only passing mentions in the biography (95, 158), one can assume that Chávez counts her among Martínez' "modern critics." So what is it that Cather fails to understand about Martínez? Is it simply that she has been unfair to a man who, as Chávez readily admits in his foreward, has "certain grave flaws in his personality"? Chávez understands his task as Martínez' biographer to be one of explaining how the priest's "genius" enabled him to stand out on various "stages": "history's stage," and the "church and socio-political stage" (*But Time*; foreword n.p.). Such stages, according to Chávez, are more or less interchangeable—"he…might have shone as much, if not more, in another time or before a different backdrop" (*But Time*; foreword n.p.). Society and institutions, according to this view, are immobile stages upon which personalities perform. They form the conditions under which historical figures act, but do not really alter their destinies. This helps explain why Chávez praises the landscape that Cather "beautifully delineates", yet objects to her distortion of the man.

Despite his condemnation of Martínez' characterization as "a lecherous ogre," Chávez is relatively unconcerned with the priest's "moral virtue or its opposite" (*But Time*; foreword n.p.). To understand what is really at stake for Chávez in Cather's portrayal, it's useful to examine his objection more closely: "The author makes a lecherous ogre of native Padre Martínez of Taos, while also demeaning his people in connection with the Penitentes. It is indeed a masterful painting of my Penitente land, but with penitential strokes that hurt" (*Penitente Land* 258). Who are Martínez's people? What is this connection to the Penitentes? Chávez himself elaborates in the penultimate chapter of *My Penitente Land*, in which he laments the French clergy's imposition of "their own 'Aryan' history" (258) onto Spanish New Mexico. These priests, whom Cather portrays so positively in *Death Comes*, in fact exhibited an "insidious feeling of superiority" (*Penitente Land* 259). One might

imagine that Chávez is advancing an anti-racist discourse against the cultural chauvinism he sees at work in Cather's novel. In reality, however, Chávez is merely objecting to the target of such chauvinism.

Martínez's people, according to Chávez, are the direct descendants of Spanish colonists. These *castizos*, as Chávez describes them, were not to blame for the "decadence" of the Penitente movement. By connecting Martínez's people, whom Chávez calls *castizos* or "Spanish New Mexicans", with the Penitentes, Cather demeans them. So who are these Penitentes, these "men of Santa Cruz [who] first shouldered their timber crosses and felt the first sting of whips in their night of strange desires" (*Penitente Land* 260), if not these same "Spanish New Mexicans"?

Chávez says they are Indians or men of mixed blood, not *castizos*:

> By no means did they represent the majority of the Hispanic population; but the few from among the humbler Hispanic folk who were usually the leaders, and those of *genízaro* or mixed descent who formed the ever-growing majority of these brothers of light and of blood, all presented a grim spectacle which, from their being so much bandied about by the newcomers, were proving to be a source of embarrassment to the native population as a whole. (*Penitente Land* 261)

This passage is notable for its "othering" of the Penitentes. Chávez takes this lay order of devout Catholics, considered by many to be quintessentially or uniquely New Mexican, and effectively places it outside the borders of "New Mexican-ness."[5] He is sensitive to the opinions of the "newcomers" (i.e., Anglo-Americans) and is embarrassed by the "grim spectacle" of the flagellants. Padre Martínez's people, that is, white New Mexicans, are here defined as "the native population as a whole." Chávez's entire rhetorical operation hinges on this dubious redefinition of New Mexico's mixed-blood and indigenous inhabitants as non-native. Although his oeuvre is otherwise dedicated to establishing cultural links between New Mexico and Spain, he must in this case deny such links because the Penitentes' ethnic composition does not accord with his belief in the pure-bloodedness of "Spanish New Mexicans." In an earlier essay, "The Penitentes of New Mexico" (1954), Chávez makes a more extended denial of links between the Penitentes and Spain. However, as J. Manuel Espinosa notes, this assertion has been "generally rejected" (460) and Chávez's own account of the Penitentes' origin seems to have been invented from whole cloth (467).

In order to maintain this fiction, Chávez insists that at the time of the Domínguez expedition (1776) "there was no intermarriage of the Spaniards and the Pueblo Indians" (*Penitente Land* 202). He admits the occasional pairing of *españoles* and *genízaras*, but takes this as a paradoxical

proof of the colonists' purity of blood and lineage: "the same thing had happened in Spain during the Moorish crusade" (*Penitente Land* 202). Chávez also recognizes the possibility of Spanish women marrying Pueblo men, but declares that this caused no cultural mixing and that the results (progeny) would have been limited to the Pueblos, because "if a Spanish woman did happen to marry a Pueblo man, she joined her husband's way of life" (*Penitente Land* 202). Chávez works hard to explain away exceptions to his narrow admissions of intermarriage and to maintain the idea that the "Spanish" colonists were of purely European descent even at the end of the 18th century. However, as Nieto-Phillips points out, intermarriage in that period was so significant that, by 1840, distinctions between "Spanish" and "castas" had disappeared. By then, bloodlines had converged to the point at which *mestizos* had been assimilated back into a "Spanish" identity. Chávez ignores this reality of racial mixing because he wants to stretch the *castizo* bloodline forward through time to the crucial date of 1848.

Chávez isn't alone in propagating erroneous ideas about the ethnic history of New Mexicans. Others who have advanced the "Spanish myth" include Antonio Blanco, Aurelio Espinosa, José López-Gastón, and Richard Nostrand (Ríos-Bustamante 2000, 22n). This last author's work is of particular significance due to its ongoing use in initiatives to preserve the region's "Spanish" heritage (United States Department of the Interior). James Blaut and Antonio Ríos-Bustamante have subjected Nostrand's work to a decisive critique:

> Nostrand did not invent the myth he propagates. It is a variant of a larger myth, the belief on the part of elites in many areas of Latin America that they are descendants of the Spanish colonizers and are not, therefore, Indian or Black or *mestizo* or *mulato*. This belief became useful ideology in New Mexico as a protection against prejudice, loss of property and civil rights, and, in recent decades, deportation. Propagated by mass media and schools, it came to be believed by many New Mexicans. But it has no basis in fact. (*Regions* 156)

Ríos-Bustamente has published research on the ethnic and social composition of Albuquerque based on the Census of 1790. His results indicate that, in direct contrast to the picture painted by Angelico Chávez, the period from Albuquerque's founding (1706) to the census (1790) witnessed intense racial mixing.[6] The extent of this *mestizaje* is camouflaged by nomenclature, as upwardly-mobile persons could be classified as *españoles*, notwithstanding their mixed heritage:

> A countervailing tendency which tends to obscure the real social reality of *mestizaje* was the social convention whereby person of significant status or property relative to

> New Mexican conditions were coopted into the group formally described as Spaniards. (*Regions* 57)

The "real social reality," according to Ríos-Bustamante, was that "anywhere from 70 to 80 percent of the population of Albuquerque were *mestizo* in fact, if not in convention by 1790" (*Regions* 57.). Albuquerque was New Mexico's largest and most important settlement at the time and was, moreover, located in the heart of Nostrand's "Hispanic Homeland," supposedly the zone of least ethnic mixing.

In retrospect, we might wonder why would anything *but* this generalized *mestizaje* constitute the "real social reality" in a region where small numbers of settlers lived in close proximity to indigenous groups? Unlike the English colonies on the Atlantic coast, New Mexico did not receive a constant stream of newcomers from its metropoles. The internal development and growth of such a society presupposes interethnic procreation and transculturation. Yet proponents of the Spanish Myth like Chávez operate under a static, timeless view of the New Mexican colonies, one employed by hispanophobes and hispanophiles alike. This myth of an unbroken genetic and cultural link between the Oñate colonists and mid-nineteenth-century New Mexicans (or Californians) conveniently allowed Anglo-Americans to justify annexations as progress, as the sweeping away of supposedly antiquated forms of governance and property claims in order to make way for a new, more efficient and productive system.[7] Conversely, progressive critics of Anglo-American Indian policy like Helen Hunt Jackson advanced an equally static, yet Edenic view of Spanish colonial society in the Southwest, one in which benevolent landlords, unpressured by capitalist standards of productivity, lived on massive feudal estates and demonstrated a paternalistic concern for the Indians under their care and protection. In this version of events, the brutal *encomienda* and *reducción* systems of forced labor are transformed into their opposite, and the absolute ethnic separation between Spanish colonists and indigenous groups is maintained in the historical imagination.

Chávez's dispute with Cather is prompted by her challenge to his fantasy of "Spanish" New Mexico. He must displace the "barbarism" and "backwardness" onto the non-white population in order for the supposedly *castizo* population to participate in the narrative of civilizational progress. In turn, this forces him to remove the ethnically mixed Penitentes from this narrative, separating them from "true" New Mexicans and from their Spanish cultural heritage. When Cather undoes this separation, as she does in *Death Comes*, it threatens Chávez's historical vision. The following passage, especially, must gall Chávez, because it makes an autochthonous origin claim for New Mexican Catholicism, in direct contradiction to his own belief in the cultural and ethnic continuity between

Spain and New Mexico: "Our religion grew out of the soil, and has its own roots. . . . The Church the Franciscan Fathers planted here was cut off; this is the second growth, and is indigenous" (168).

Angélico Chávez's version of the "Spanish Myth" consists of a strong cultural affiliation with Spain, a minimization of ties with New Spain (Mexico), and the denial of significant mixing among the "Spanish" colonists and the Pueblo Indians. The clearest statement of Chávez's historical outlook is found in a speech he gave at the inauguration of Gerald Thomas as President of New Mexico State University. Titled "The Authentic New Mexican," the speech delineates New Mexican colonist's economic and social activity in such a way as to bracket the possibility of miscegenation. A few extracts should suffice to convey Chávez's main assertions: "The original settlers were a distinct breed of Spaniards . . . [T]hey were common rural stockmen with the pastoral traditions of . . . La Mancha and Extremadura. . . . Those who were born in New Spain were of the same southwestern Castilian blood and pastoral tradition" (2). Here Chávez insists that the settlers of New Mexico were either Spanish-born or their children "of the same…blood" and therefore not *mestizos*, even those born in the Americas. Furthermore, he insists that the settlers were *stockmen*, not farmers**:**

> [A]mong the first settlers, a couple of men whose descendants were now leading citizens had married Tlascaltec women whom they had brought along as servants; one or the other captain who had arrived in later times, while passing for a Spaniard, had Mestizo blood. . . . [A] few of the families which came from Zacatecas had been full Mestizos. . . . (But, contrary to popular Anglo and Pueblo Indian erroneous belief, the Hispanos of New Mexico did not intermarry with the Pueblo Indians.) (3)

Chávez downplays the instances of *mestizaje* that he knows are part of the historical record: "a couple of men"; "one or the other captain"; "a few of the families". At the same time, he flatly denies intermarriage between the colonists and their nearest neighbors, the Pueblo Indians, with whom they lived in a complex, centuries-long relationship of competition and cooperation. As noted before, the lack of generalized *mestizaje* in such a context is implausible, and Chávez must strain to make the idea credible: "A true Spanish enclave was established but, sad to say, one too narrowly specialized. There were no artisans among the colonists, no men of the professions, no educators. If any came later sporadically, they fell into the local pastoral pattern" (2). Angélico Chávez again insists on the settlers' pastoral culture, because this will allow him to claim that only stockmen on their haciendas are true Hispanos (authentic New Mexicans)—other professions (which come to employ more people than stockraising) are, in Chávez's account, taken up by indigenous outsiders:

> A proud pastoral people, no matter how primitive in outlook and how unlettered, they felt the need for menial labor among their large herds and flocks and in their spreading haciendas. Few of their Hispano compadres, no matter how poor, cared to demean themselves that way. . . . Under the guise of Christianizing and civilizing the wild Indians of the plains, they began "adopting" women and children from the diverse plains tribes. (3)

This, according to Chávez, describes the genesis of the *genízaro* caste. Any racial mixing occurred among these detribalized Indians, and not usually between Indians and Hispanos, except when "some married into the poorer Hispanic families" (3). Again, Chávez minimizes and treats as exceptional something that more disinterested modern scholarship tells us was generalized.

Likewise, census data analyzed by Ríos-Bustamante flatly contradict Chávez's characterization of the colony's overspecialization in stockraising. New Mexico's major economic hub, then as now, was Albuquerque. The 1790 census for the Alcaldía de San Felipe de Albuquerque shows a fair degree of occupational diversity (*Regions* 103-05). Ranchers are fewer in number than farmers, roughly on a par with weavers, and slightly outnumber sheepherders. The relative numbers are similar in more rural locales. What distinguishes ranching from other occupations is not its economic centrality. Rather, since ranching required land ownership, it was an occupation that came to be reserved almost exclusively for wealthy *españoles*. By exaggerating the importance of ranching and by making the false claim that there were no artisans, teachers or professionals in the colonies, Chávez reduces colonial society to *español* landowners.

This is not to say that colonial New Mexico was well integrated or that it didn't, in fact, have its own exclusionary structures. It is clear that the occupational division was an ethnic or caste hierarchy. There was also an important geographical dimension to colonial society, produced by pressure from non-Pueblo indigenous groups. Although Chávez claims that the *genízaros* came into being to provide labor for expanding ranching operations, this caste in fact emerged as a consequence of the trade in Plains Indians, which Chávez calls "adopting." Subsequent to the Pueblo Revolt (1680), New Mexican colonists could no longer conscript labor from the Pueblos. Plains people were abducted or purchased and employed in various forms of domestic and menial labor. This produced a caste of persons who were ethnically indigenous yet culturally Hispanicized. The boundaries of this caste are unclear (Doris Avery gives the most comprehensive treatment of the matter), and New Mexican authorities may have designated some Pueblo Indians as *genízaros*. Once freed from other labor obligations, many *genízaros* were employed as specialized frontier scouts

and warriors (hence the etymological parallel with "Janissary"). Eventually, *genízaros* were allowed to settle in peripheral zones, often with official *mercedes*, or land grants. As what Pekka Hämäläinen has described as the "Comanche Empire" came to dominate the southern Great Plains, the New Mexico colonists were forced to create a buffer zone to limit incursions, not only from Comanches, but also from Apaches, Navajos, and Utes affected by the rapid expansion of Comanchería.

New Mexico was (and continues to be) a complex society characterized by interethnic dependency and competition. Chávez, with his rhetoric of authenticity, reduces "New Mexico" to those defined as *españoles*. Yet at moments he is forced to acknowledge ethnic and class complexity, moving the *genízaros* in and out of "New Mexico" as it suits his rhetorical purpose. When describing the Chimayó Revolt, he pushes this unrest to the racialized margins, blaming the *genízaros*. "The only revolution against the Mexican regime was staged by these Genizaros in 1839, as a protest against Mexican taxation law" ("Authentic" 4). This is a gross oversimplification made necessary by Chávez's desire to describe New Mexicans as essentially *castizo*, or Spanish, while also portraying them as placid and staid citizens who would easily adopt the Anglo-American political system.

Speaking in 1970, at the height of the Chicano Movement from which he wished to distance New Mexico, Chávez minimizes the class dimensions of the Río Arriba uprisings[8] and downplays links with Mexico, traditionally viewed as a site of class struggle (Mexican Revolution) and autocracy (López de Santa Anna) in the Anglo-American historical imagination. Chávez states, "New Mexican Hispanos readily accepted the term 'Mexican,' but the ones who were really overjoyed by it were the Genízaros" ("Authentic" 4), and explains that the latter group embraced Mexican identity in order to place themselves "on equal footing with their former patrones" (4). Chávez acknowledges class stratification but, as indicated previously, he considers *genízaros* to be an alien element, not true New Mexicans. The "Hispano element," he says, put down the revolt and "quickly accepted the Anglo-American intrusion, as it seemed to promise a better future than either Spain or Mexico had provided" (4). Yet in this same discourse he shifts from an ethnic definition of authenticity to a political one. Having ushered *genízaros* back into the "Hispanic" fold via the deus ex machina of the "melting pot," he goes on to say the following: "Today, the authentic Spanish New Mexican, with whatever racial admixture . . . considers himself a United States citizen first . . . This is why, for example, New Mexicans as a whole have not risen to the call of people like the Tijerinas, who are of Mexican origin with an inborn hate of the Colossus of the North" (5). Finally, Chávez pushes *genízaros* back out of the circle of authenticity by insisting that Tijerina's followers are not true New Mexicans: "Those who follow any demagogues now are, in the main, poor descendants of Genizaros

who still hold a grudge from long ago, or some few people of recent Mexican origin who now live in the northern part of the state" (5).

Chávez, writing in the latter half of the 20th-century, is in fact echoing an earlier strategy of marginalizing non-white elements of New Mexican society and deemphasizing links with Mexico. This strategy was, in fact, an astute one as far as well-to-do New Mexicans were concerned. Linda Noel explains that when statehood was being debated for New Mexico and Arizona Territories, "pluralism, the strategy that predominated in New Mexico, emphasized that people of Mexican descent or *nativos*, as some called themselves to emphasize their long nativity in the area, shared a common European history with Anglos due to their 'pure' Spanish lineage" (434). This led to more equitable political participation (at least for those white or wealthy enough to pass as "Spanish") in New Mexico than in Arizona, where "marginalization . . . assured . . . that people of Mexican descent either remained safely under the control of their Anglo employers or would not stay long in the country. Consequently, they would have no major role in either the new state or the nation as a whole" (Noel 435).

Chávez pulls *genízaros* into the community of "New Mexicans" in order to seem liberal, inclusive, and democratic (in keeping with "American values"), only to push them out again, safeguarding the origin story of New Mexican elites, whose self-interest required allying themselves with Anglo-Americans and reimagining themselves as fellow Europeans (Spaniards), all the while distancing themselves from their indigenous roots and contemporary Pueblo and *genízaro* neighbors. This taking of one's distance from indigenous elements also characterizes *Death Comes For the Archbishop*. Latour, during his deathbed recollections, ponders the fate of Indians (the Navajos) with paternalistic concern, yet the novel as a whole treats them as civilization's other, as something alien and evil. As Astrid Haas writes, "Latour perceives the Amerindians as timeless creatures…whose cultures were irreconcilably different from Western civilization and its progressive drive." Drawing on legends surrounding Pecos Pueblo, Cather has Latour descend into a grotto associated with the snake cult. The priest felt "an extreme distaste for the place" (147) and later reflects that "it seemed almost to lend a colour of probability to some of those unpleasant stories about the Pecos religion" (153-54).

By this point in the novel, Cather has already established an association between reptiles and evil. Recall her description of Buck Scales, the Anglo murderer who is hanged after his Mexican wife escapes and testifies against him: "He was tall, gaunt and ill-formed, with a snake-like neck, terminating in a small, bony head. Under his close-clipped hair this repellent head showed a number

of thick ridges, as if the skull joinings were overgrown by layers of superfluous bone. With its small, rudimentary ears, this head had a positively malignant look" (77-78). Cather treats the indigenous past as a well of superstition, a wholly unknowable and negative void in a dark, remote past. How different this is from her treatment of European (French) culture, whose accumulation of history only enriches and enlightens—"there are, perhaps, a thousand years of history in this soup" (44)—and which is linked via the Church to ancient Rome. Cather incorporates rumors of human sacrifice, associated with the Tewa cult of Avanyu, in order to portray the decline of Pecos Pueblo as the result of an elevated infant mortality stemming from such barbarous superstitions and practices as ritual infanticide (142) and of the lack of modern hygiene and medicine: "Indian babies were never bathed in winter, and it was useless to suggest treatment for the sick ones. On that subject the Indian ear was closed to advice" (140). As is typical in Eurocentric narratives, no mention is made of similarly "barbaric" European beliefs and practices (e.g. medieval Christian indifference to hygiene and self-care, witch hunts [ritual femicide], and capital punishment). Although Cather mentions the Spanish practice of extracting labor and slaves from Pecos, she seems unaware that this was only the first phase of a complex history of exploitation and collaboration. The real reasons for the disappearance of Pecos Pueblo, as well as other important aspects of the New Mexican social dynamic prior to annexation, are minimized or ignored by the ethnocentric narratives of both Cather and Chávez. Pecos was almost totally destroyed by Comanche raids in the 1770s, a casualty of the New Mexican practice of allowing its Pueblo allies to bear the brunt of nomadic incursions into its eastern buffer zone. It underwent a brief revival during the peace subsequent to De Anza's treaty with Ecuerecapa (signed at Pecos), but then declined again as Comanche trade priorities moved elsewhere. Native protagonism, whether involving Comanche–g*enízaro* relations or voluntary Pueblo migration, is absent from Cather's narrative. Her tale of serpents, stagnation, and remote superstitions—reinforced by her ominous atmospheric descriptions—blots out Pecos Pueblo's more recent history of adaptation: "The wind, [Latour] knew, was blowing out of the inky cloud bank that lay behind the mountain at sunset; but it might well be blowing out of a remote, black past. The only human voice raised against it ws the feeble wailing of the sick child in the cradle" (143). Cather's French priests bring moral and civilizational order into a wild land "still waiting to be made into a landscape" (109). *Death Comes*, like *O Pioneers!*, is a frontier story. It is the tale of taming, of domestication, not as a fait accompli, but as a heroic effort (Hercules in the Aegean Stables). It is a narrative of beginnings. As her novel reaches its conclusion, Cather must recapture that spirit with a

long and wistful flashback in which a dying Latour relives his youth in France while taking his last breaths of New Mexico's still-fresh air:

> Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert, for that wind that made one a boy again. He had noticed that this peculiar quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvests. . . . The moisture of ploughed land, the heaviness of labour and growth and grain-bearing, utterly destroyed it; one could breath that only on the bright edges of the world, on the great grass plains or the sage-brush desert. (313)

Cather values civilization, but is preoccupied by the possibility of its stagnation. Civilization, for Cather, has become too comfortable and shop-worn. It most be rejuvenated by contact with the wilderness. Cather's vision of wilderness as salutary, even necessary for the health of the nation precedes *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Aldo Leopold's landmark environmental statement, by over two decades. Like Cather's novel, Leopold's work contains echoes of the social Darwinism and white supremacy that has woven its way through the environmental movement from John Muir to Edward Abbey. As Jake Kosek notes, "the theatre of wilderness" in which white Americans reenact their frontier history "bears no traces of land dispossession, immigrant labor, or slavery" (162). Nowhere is this more salient than in New Mexico, where the national forests have been instruments of dispossession, functioning in the name of a polity that reserves these spaces for its own fantasies of "man vs. wild" while banning traditional use of the forests as commons. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, New Mexican geography serves as a vast backdrop for epic of European civilization, first for the Spanish priests, then for Anglo-Americans. If "the old countries were worn to the shape of human life," the American frontier offered a healthy discomfort; "Everything was dry, prickly, sharp" (316); "Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants" (316). This vision of the wilderness frontier, of course, depends on the misconception that Indians did not themselves shape their environment. On the contrary, in Cather's mind they were shaped by the land, "man made cruel by a cruel life" (316). According to this view, only Europeans like Latour are capable of arranging, building, and leaving their mark on the land. As Kosek writes, "at stake are the notions of nature and its purity that continue to work as a reservoir for ingrained conceptions of race and for the reproduction of exclusionary logics of racial difference" (182).

Much as the discourse of environmentalism causes the human history of these lands to vanish beneath the category of "wilderness," Cather's frontier stories, most notably *O Pioneers!*, tend to erase the history of the dispossession of the Plains Indians. Although Melissa Ryan believes that "Cather's encounter with Indian civilizations of the Southwest . . . is characterized more by admiration than dehumanization" and that "the agrarian culture of Southwest Indians would cohere with Cather's sense of universal in a way the nomadic plains tribes would not" (Ryan 288), no such coherence or continuity is to be found in *Death Comes*. In fact, the attitude towards indigenous civilization in *O Pioneers!* is remarkably similar to that found in the later novel. Mike Fischer notes that "[I]n *O Pioneers!*, [Cather] conceives of 'the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races [as] so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings'" (qtd. Ryan 288).

Archaeological, genetic, and environmental records tell an entirely different story of course, one that must be sublimated by Cather in order to construct her tale of (a particular) civilization's progress, and by Chávez in order to claim a role for white Hispanics in that same tale. Both narratives participate in the formation of a national identity that trades in the trope of historical (manifest) destiny. If Chávez's version of the narrative is less cohesive—not appearing in novels but in disparate genres and even in paintings[9]—it is no less coherent.

His story of New Mexico places it firmly in a European and Judeo-Christian trajectory of expansion and world domination, softened somewhat by its supposed culmination in multicultural democracy. This is not too different from Cather's preference for Latour's "softer," Francocentric imperialism to the "hard" rule of Spanish priests. Étienne Balibar has written of the inseparability of national identity formation and ethnic identity formation. National communities, he writes, "have to institute in real (and therefore in historical) time their imaginary unity *against* other possible unities" (Balibar and Wallerstein 49). Moreover, racialization, or the construction of ethnic identities for marginalized groups, is "a historical system of complementary exclusions and dominations which are mutually interconnected" (49). Faced with domination by Anglo-Americans, New Mexicans were forced to choose among competing responses or postures. These included the possibility of acquiescing to their new, subordinate role, or resisting. New Mexicans, by and large, chose resistance, but along divergent paths. These paths include direct armed and/or legal struggle like that of the anti-enclosure Gorras Blancas (1890s) and the land-grant activists of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (founded in 1963), the construction of a competing nationalism (the Chicano Movement) and what can be characterized as a liberal Hispanicism that fights for inclusion within a multicultural

democracy. This last option is represented by Angélico Chávez and, as we have seen, it implies certain exclusions and dominations. For just as this liberal Hispanicism battles for its own inclusion in the body politic, it takes its distance from other groups. Like Cather's Francophilia, it externalizes the indigene as the Other, relegating Indians to a wild, precivilizational past. And like many other ethnocentrisms, Chávez's identifies a particular group for internal differentiation. The *genízaros* become the classic insider-outsiders, "Hispanic," but not "authentic New Mexicans." The class dimension of these ethnic exclusions should by now be obvious, since, according to Chávez, ranching (i.e., property ownership) is at the core of New Mexican society.

Conclusion: Reflections on *Chicanismo*'s Relationship to Indigeneity

As noted above, Angélico Chávez is often included in anthologies of Chicano writing. This is the case despite his own refusal of both the term "Chicano" and the ethnic nationalism that dominated the politics of the Chicano Movement. I do not wish to argue against his inclusion in the Chicano canon. His attempts to situate Hispanic New Mexicans as equals and his recovery of much of their history and heritage from forgotten archives certainly make him a fellow traveller of many Chicano historians, at least in this limited sense. Moreover, despite his conservatism and his exclusion of indigenous groups from his definition of the "authentic New Mexican," Chávez shares certain affinities with Chicano writers and activists of the Left, who also place the indigene under erasure, albeit in different ways and in the service of wildly disparate political ends. Without going beyond Chávez's immediate historical and geographical context, I would point to Reies López Tijerina and Rudolfo Anaya as examples.[10]

Angélico Chávez's political project was to redeem Hispanic New Mexican identity and culture from more than a century of devaluation at the hands of Anglo writers, settlers, and land speculators. As I have shown, however, he carves out a space for Hispanic New Mexicans in the polity of the United States by executing a two-fold strategy that involves misrepresenting their ethnic history while distancing them culturally and politically from their Pueblo and Plains Indian neighbors, as well as from Mexico. The fact that Chicano writers on the Left also mythologize their history and distort their relationship with indigenous groups—usually by claiming indigenous labels and legacies—should induce us to reconsider the relationship between the Chicano Movement (including its institutionalized wing, Chicano Studies) and indigeneity. Scholars have begun to take up the question of the specific relationship of *Chicanismo* to indigeneity.[11] Some Chicano activists (primarily those inspired by Marxism-Leninism) preferred an internationalist outlook to the

Movement's conscious appropriation of Aztec mythology to build a nationalist identity, yet, as Lourdes Alberto points out, systematic inquiry into particular forms of Chicano indigenism has developed only recently, in the wake of the indigenous Zapatista insurgency in Southern Mexico, which has provided a framework for producing connections (and highlighting differences) between Mexican–Americans and indigenous groups in Mexico and the United States (42). Alberto states that her critical inquiry into Chicano appropriation of indigenous identity is not merely intended to "counter the widely held belief that indigenous subjectivity is Chicano/as subjectivity and vice versa," but also to connect these identities in terms of a shared history of racialization and global political economy (13). Likewise, my intention has not been simply to assert that indigeneity is *Chicanismo*'s constitutive other, but to call for scholarship to ground both indigeneity and the varieties of *Chicanismo* in the political-economic dynamics which produce them. This is a question I intend to take up in a more extensive study of Angélico Chávez's relationship to major Chicano figures in New Mexico.

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Notes

[1] See Mares (1988, 1989).
[2] Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America* is the paradigmatic retort to the dominant narrative.
[3] Accounts of the rise of "Spanish" identity in New Mexico can be found in Gonzales (2006) and Noel (2011).
[4] Bridgers makes the insightful observation that Cather attributes the adventurous aspects of Lamy's personality to Joseph Machebouf (Vaillant), making Latour quieter, more introspective, and more like herself (360).
[5] Chávez, importantly, does not object to local Catholic religious practices in general. He sees the cult of La Conquistadora, for instance, as central to New Mexican religious and ethnic identity (García 52). Yet this particular image of the virgin, as one might surmise from her name, is closely associated with Spanish colonization and, despite Chávez's assertions to the contrary, "was promoted by elites" and did not originate in a popular religious movement (Carroll 60).
[6] Additional census data, discussed in Brooks (2002) and Gutiérrez (1991), corroborate Ríos-Bustamante's conclusions.
[7] In reality, by the time of annexation, the Hispanic Southwest had left the *encomienda* system far behind. It had been replaced by the land grant system designed to increase settlement on the northern frontier and, as Correia (2013) notes, settlers had adopted notions of land ownership broadly in line with the Anglo-American system of property rights based on Locke's labor theory of property.
[8] See Brooks (2002) for discussion of the class struggle at the heart of the Río Arriba rebellions and of the difference in the respective class and ethnic compositions of the Río Abajo and Río Arriba regions. It is significant that Río Arriba, the poorer and more ethnically diverse region north of Santa Fe, was the site of the 19th-century revolts. Cather's identification of Taos as the epicenter of resistence was, in this regard, perspicacious.
[9] One of Chávez's paintings, titled "Uncle Sam and His Forty-eight Daughters" (1925), is on display in Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors. It depicts a giant, flag-festooned and eagle-ornamented early-20th-century automobile speeding towards the West Coast with Uncle Sam and his "daughters," viz. the forty-eight states of the union, on board. The teenage artist signed the painting as "Manuel Chávez," his birth name.
[10] One of the most prominent Chicano leaders, Tijerina (1926–2015) was a land-grant activist who led the Alianza Federal de Mercedes. Rudolfo Anaya (b. 1937) is a Chicano autor best known for his coming-of-age novel *Bless Me, Última*, a frequent target of school censorship campaigns.
[11] See Alberto (2012) and Contreras (2008) for detailed inquiries into this relationship.