

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 013 152

RC 001 521

SITUATION OF THE SPANISH AMERICANS OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO.

BY- KNOWLTON, CLARK S.

PUB DATE 65

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.32 8P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AMERICAN CULTURE, ACCULTURATION, DISCRIMINATORY ATTITUDES (SOCIAL), ECONOMICS, ETHNIC GROUPS, *INCOME, LEADERSHIP, NATURAL RESOURCES, RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS, SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION, SPANISH, *SPANISH AMERICANS, *UNEMPLOYMENT, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, *WELFARE, NEW MEXICO (NORTHERN),

THE SPANISH AMERICANS OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO HAVE CONSTITUTED ONE OF THE UNRECOGNIZED DISADVANTAGED GROUPS. PER CAPITA INCOME IS LOW AND THE RATES OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE ARE HIGH. THE CAUSES OF THE PRESENT SITUATION ARE--(1) LOSS OF LAND, (2) CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATORY ATTITUDES, (3) NON-PROVISION OF ADEQUATE PROGRAMS TO ACCELERATE THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS, (4) TOO LIMITED DEVELOPMENT OF FLOOD AND IRRIGATION SYSTEMS, (5) INADEQUATE SCHOOL SYSTEMS, (6) INEFFICIENT FARMING PRACTICES, AND (7) LACK OF DEVELOPMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION INCLUDE--PROGRAMS OF ACCULTURATION, ECONOMIC PROGRAMS, SYSTEMATIC IDENTIFICATION AND UTILIZATION OF SPANISH AMERICAN LEADERS, A SYSTEM TO PROVIDE LAND, VILLAGE IRRIGATION SYSTEMS, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. (JS)

ED013152

THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL STUDIES
Adams State College of Colorado
Alamosa

ALFRED M. POTTS, 2d

THE SITUATION OF THE SPANISH AMERICANS
OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

Dr. Clark S. Knowlton
Department of Sociology
Texas Western College

Presented at the Conference on Poverty in the Southwest
Tucson, Arizona
January 25, 1965

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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THE SITUATION OF THE SPANISH AMERICANS
OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

Clark S. Knowlton
Texas Western College

Formed by the southernmost extension of the Rocky Mountains and split into two by the Rio Grande Valley, Northern New Mexico is a well-wooded peninsula with fairly abundant precipitation, rising high above the semi-arid plains and plateaus of the Southwest. Almost all of central and eastern New Mexico and West Texas as well as parts of Oklahoma are directly dependent upon water resources originating in northern New Mexico. They are immediately and drastically affected by the region's changing water and land use pattern, erosion, precipitation, processes of industrialization and urbanization, and race and culture relations.

This mountainous zone is inhabited primarily by the Spanish Americans, descendants of late 17th and 18th century Spanish and Indian colonizers and inhabitants. Today, they form a compact rural grouping in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico with ribbons of settlement running along all the major rivers and streams flowing from the northern mountains.

Perhaps no other section of the entire Southwest has attracted so much attention from artists, writers, and tourists. Influences of geography, culture, and "atmosphere" have combined to bring about the creation of a regional school of art and literature that has produced much of value. It has, however, blanketed the area with a false romantic haze that effectively conceals Spanish American poverty, economic decline, malnutrition, abandoned villages, eroded lands, high rates of infant and adult mortality, and out-migration, economic and cultural exploitation, and apathy and despair.

Like the American Indians, the Spanish Americans were conquered in war and forced to become citizens of the United States against their will. Like the Indians, their personal and property rights were guaranteed to them by a treaty, the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that was broken as soon as it was signed. Like

the Indians they have been treated as a conquered people with no enforceable property or personal rights. Unlike the Indians, they have, however, at no time enjoyed even the most minimal and ambiguous protection offered the Indians by a government bureau and by interested private organizations.

They were left defenceless before the invading, dynamic, legalistic, lawless, and harshly competitive Anglo American civilization that did nothing to prepare them for adequate citizenship, stripped them of most of their land, reduced them to the situation of a conquered people and plunged them into deep poverty.

The results of a little over one hundred years of Anglo control in northern New Mexico have been the creation of a distressed area whose living conditions tend to resemble those of Latin America rather than the United States. Statistics on median family income, per capita income, unemployment, drop-cuts, out-migration welfare, and other social indexes of poverty and social disorganization sharply silhouette the modern poverty of the Spanish American. Although time does not permit a detailed treatment of existing statistics a few figures may be in order. In every case the data quoted is from the last year of available information.

In 1961 the per capita income for New Mexico was \$1,846. Among the predominantly Anglo counties it fluctuated between \$2,000 and \$3,000. In grim contrast the per capita income in the six Spanish-American counties ranged from a low of \$662 per individual to a high of \$818 in a more fortunate county. In the same year the rate of unemployment in New Mexico was 5.1 percent of the state's labor force. Among the Spanish American counties, it ranged from 5.6 percent in the best county to 16 percent in the more unfortunate counties. Few Southwesterners are aware of the incredible extent to which northern New Mexico has developed a subsidized welfare economy. The six Spanish American counties contained only about 13.54 percent of the state population in 1963, but they received 30.77 percent of all welfare expenditures.

The causes of the present tragic situation are easy to trace. They involve the following factors: (1) The continued and systematic shift of land from the Spanish Americans to the Anglo-Americans either by force and violence or by entrapment in a legal and tax system completely foreign and alien to the Spanish Americans. Since 1854, the Spanish Americans have lost over 2,000,000 acres of private lands, 1,700,000 acres of communal lands, 1,800,000 acres taken over by the state, and even more enormous acreages lost without remuneration to the Federal government. (2) The existence of cultural and linguistic intolerance and arrogance among the Anglo-Americans that alienated the Spanish Americans and created enormous problems of cultural prejudices, discrimination, social disorganization, acculturation, family breakdown, rural poverty, and other serious social problems. (3) The treatment of the Spanish Americans as a conquered people with little attention given to their traditional land and water usages, (4) The failure of private, state, and federal agencies, since the 1930's to develop regional programs adjusted to the cultural values of the Spanish Americans and to their basic needs as defined by the Spanish Americans themselves, (5) The development of costly flood control and irrigation systems in New Mexico that have led to the massive displacement of Spanish American farmers. They have been the victims of almost every such large scale project in New Mexico. (6) The creation of a school system that in spite of heroic endeavors of teachers and administrators has failed to prepare Spanish Americans to adjust to the modern industrialized and urbanized Anglo-American civilization. Rather it has had the unique honor of graduating children illiterate in two languages, ashamed of themselves, their culture, and their people, and unprepared either for life in a large Anglo city or in a Spanish American rural village, (7) The persistence of inefficient and traditional farming practices, (8) The lack of development and even survey of the many natural resources of northern New Mexico. It is ironic that many of the mountainous segments of the United States with the same natural environment and resources as say Switzerland and Norway are so poverty stricken.

There is much that can be done to remedy the problems of the declining Spanish American economy and way of life in northern New Mexico. They are as follows: (1) A realization on the part of public and private agencies that the future of New Mexico is seriously compromised unless the Spanish Americans can be brought into the mainstream of economic opportunity and development. (2) The realization that every problem in the area has its economic, social, and cultural components. Unless proper attention is given to the complexity of the situation, private and government programs will fail in the future as they have failed in the past, (3) The utilization of the Spanish American village as the basic unit of research, study, and action programs by private and public organizations rather than the individual farmer. (4) The development of a community type school system specifically adjusted to the vocational and educational needs of the Spanish American children. The schools must accept the continued existence of Spanish American language and culture rather than continue the present cold war between the schools and the local culture and language. (5) The creation of regionalized programs specifically adjusted to improve the conditions of Spanish American life and to meet the needs of the Spanish Americans as they define them and not as defined by Anglo administrators. (6) The formation of handicraft boards either state, federal, or private, to foster Spanish American handicrafts such as the Federal Government is now doing with the Indian groups of the Southwest. (7) The development of state or federal marketing and grading services for village products such as Christmas trees, fruit, chili, and vegetables so that the Spanish American farmer receives full value for his products, (8) The formation of village cooperatives and the encouragement of Spanish American small businessmen to create local industries that might have a chance to survive, (9) The systematic identification, training, and utilization of village leaders, (10) A massive land purchase program to restore to the villages the range and crop land

that once belonged to them under conditions that will prevent alienation again.

(11) The rehabilitation of adequate village irrigation systems. In such a program the government agency might furnish technical personnel and heavy equipment on a matching basis with the villagers supplying raw materials and labor in such a way as to leave no debt or charges upon the land. (1) A comprehensive and enriched vocational training program for young people and adults to equip them with the skills needed to move out into the larger society if they desire or to earn a decent living if they prepare to remain in the villages.

In closing let me say that either the Spanish Americans of northern New Mexico will receive the assistance that they need to solve their many complex social, economic, and cultural problems, or they will continue to be a bleeding abscess upon the economic health of New Mexico and the Southwest. If the Spanish speaking people not only of New Mexico but of the Southwest were encouraged to preserve their language and culture as well as assisted to find their proper position in the Southwest, they could serve as a cultural bridge of understanding between Latin and Anglo America and thus help to break down the tortilla curtain along the Rio Grande.