

# UCLA prof tells Aggies Mexican 'types' wrong

By JAMES HAMILTON  
Battalion Reporter

Today's prevalent definitions of Mexican culture — from both social and anthropological standpoints — are inaccurate, a UCLA anthropologist told a Texas A&M University audience Tuesday night. Jose E. Limon spoke to the MSC Committee for Awareness of Mexican American Culture on the topic of Mexican Identity and the Texas Cultural Community. Limon said that throughout Texas there have been several misconceptions and definitions of Mexican culture. "The first notion of Mexican culture is what I call a 'stereotypic culture,'" Limon said. "This consists of a system of alleged behavior patterns, value patterns and beliefs that are attributed to a population by people external to that population. In this case, external people perceived Mexican culture and began to formulate a series of observations about what they think Mexican people are all about." Limon said the first stereotyping of Mexicans in Texas can be traced back to Texas pre-statehood days. He said it began when American

settlers first encountered Mexican farmers and ranchers in what is now the southern Rio Grande Valley.

"The first contact was essentially hostile and resulted in a dominant-subordinate system of social relations, which more or less tends to be characteristic even today," Limon said.

He added that the most common stereotypic ideas were that Mexicans were "lazy, inclined toward criminal mischief, and hypersexual."

"We are dealing with unrealities here," he said. "Never mind the fact that most of these people did and still do work from sunrise to sundown. A study of the land transfers in southern Texas might lead one to certain types of questions about where the criminality really lies, but never mind that fact."

"The point is that the perception of Mexicans was very early tainted by this business of criminality — the Mexican as a bandit."

Limon said the situation became worse in the early 1900s when the movie industry began. He said that many of the first movies were Westerns in which the villains were usually portrayed as either Mexicans or Indians.

He said that during the late 1950s and early 1960s, "limited" anthropological research was done on the Mexican population of southern Texas. The researchers examined Mexican family life, religion, medicine and "core values."

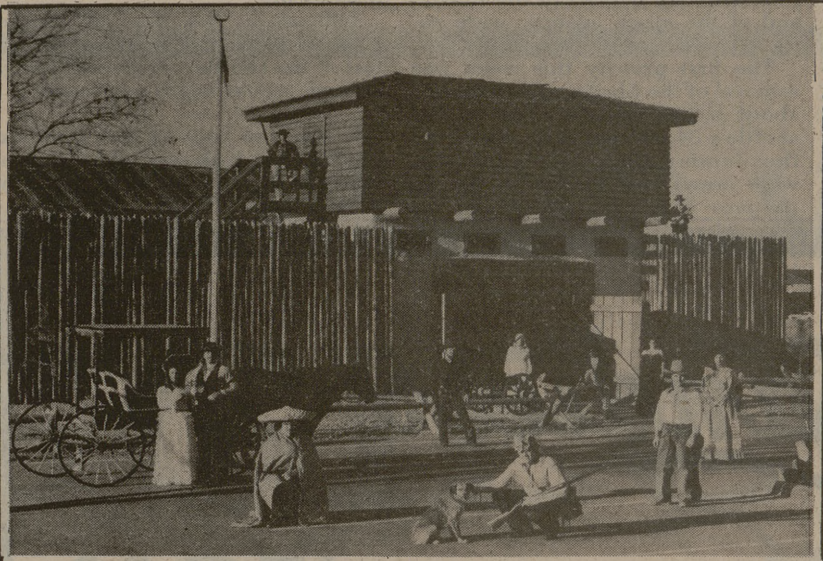
Their findings, Limon said, indicated that Mexicans didn't think toward the future, had an enormous suspicion of their fellow men and women, and possessed a "deep and pervasive sense of fatalism."

Limon disagrees.

"I came from Laredo, Texas," he said, "and I have cousins spread up and down the river (the Rio Grande) on both sides. I don't like that picture in some sort of emotional, visceral way."

Limon said he does agree with some of the other findings, such as those that indicate a sense of strong family unity.

"Most of us will agree that the family is important in Mexican culture and that there appears to be a different importance for the family — different, that is, at least in intensity from the data we have on Anglo-American society," Limon said.



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