Research Note

The 1887 Census of Texas' Hispanic Population

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Scholars interested in the demographic evolution of Mexican Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are handicapped by the absence of population totals for Hispanics in published United States census reports prior to 1930. Cultural geographers and historians have resorted to making estimates and to hand-counting manuscript census population schedules, a laborious and time-consuming process which has yet to be completed.[1] Moreover, the 1890 manuscript schedules were destroyed long ago, leaving a serious gap in the unpublished census data.

Fortunately, a partial remedy for this problem is available for the state of Texas. The long-forgotten 1887 state census, containing a count of the Hispanic population, has recently been rediscovered by the author.[2] This mistitled census has rested forgotten and unknown to students of Mexican American demography on shelves in almost every library of consequence in Texas for nearly a century. Not only does the 1887 Texas census contain the sole published, post-annexation enumeration of nineteenth-century Hispanic Americans, but it also provides an approximate replacement for the destroyed 1890 schedules. To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has ever referred to this census, leading me to feel secure in describing it as overlooked.

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The Hispanic Count

The census revealed a Hispanic population of 79,833, consisting of 78,878 "Mexicans," 940 "Spanish," and 15 "Chilians" (see figure 1 and table 1).[3] Perhaps some of the census marshals sought to distinguish pure-blood *tejano* Castilians from *mestizos* and Hispanicized *indios* by using the separate terms "Spanish" and "Mexican." In any case, most of the enumerators employed only the latter term. The editor of the census volume referred repeatedly to the "foreign-born population," but it is clear that Texas-born ethnics were also included. Zapata County, for example, was shown to be 98.4 percent "Mexican," leaving no doubt that the entire Mexican Amer-

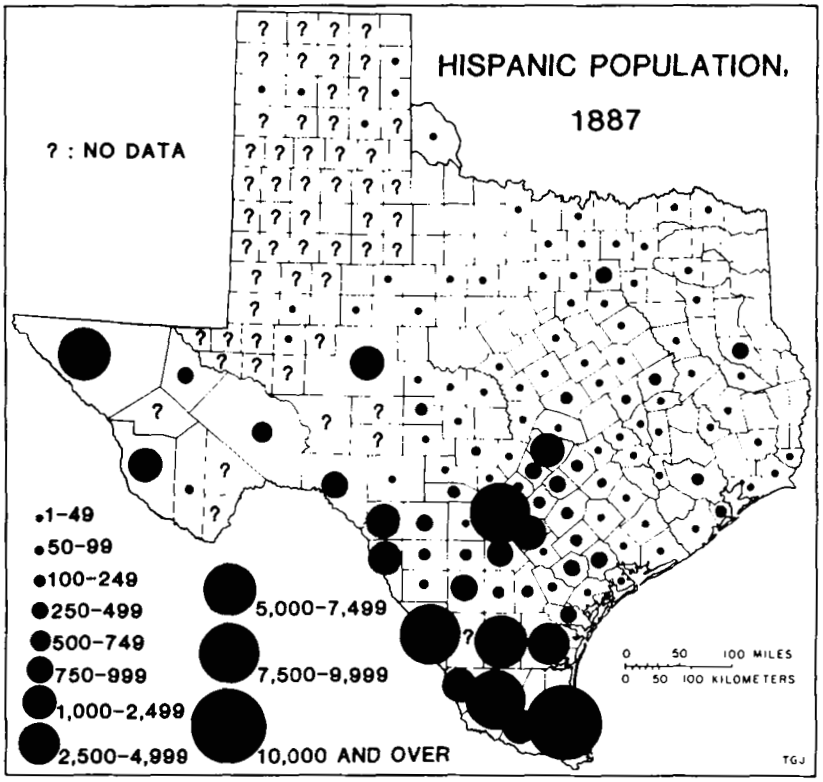

Figure 1. Hispanic Population, 1887
Source: Texas Census of 1887, pp. 1-250.

Table 1
Texas Counties With 500 or More Hispanic Inhabitants, December 31, 1887

County	Number of Mexicans	Number of Spanish	Total Hispanic Element	Hispanic Population As a Percentage of Total
Cameron	15,229	208	15,437	91
Starr	8,074	0	8,074	97
Webb	8,048	0	8,048	90
Bexar	7,688	101	7,789	17
El Paso	6,461	20	6,481	46
Duval	5,615	17	5,632	93
Nueces	3,558	67	3,625	53
Presidio	2,378	0	2,378	85
Zapata	2,288	0	2,288	98
Hidalgo	2,098	0	2,098	51
Wilson	2,023	26	2,049	25
Maverick	1,534	0	1,534	69
Travis	1,350	0	1,350	4
Kinney	1,232	0	1,232	36
Tom Green	1,132	0	1,132	25
Val Verde	990	0	990	49
Atascosa	810*	8	818	21
La Salle	764	0	764	50
Pecos	526	0	526	78

*The 810 Mexicans were mistakenly listed as "Italians", apparently caused by a typographical error.

ican element was contained in the population figures. Four other counties were listed as 90 percent or more Hispanic, and a total of eleven Texas counties had Mexican American majorities (see figure 2). In the state as a whole, Hispanics made up 4.05 percent of the population, placing them behind Afro-Americans (20.0 percent) and Germans (6.5 percent) as the third largest ethnic minority in Texas.[4]

Nineteen counties had more than 500 Hispanic inhabitants, led by Cameron County with over 15,000 (see table 1 and figure 1). Even the eighteenth-century Hispanic ethnic island in Nacogdoches County, East Texas, is included, represented by a population of 374. The group of New Mexican *pastores* in the Texas Panhandle also remained intact in Oldham and Potter counties. In addition to Texas proper, figures are provided for Greer County, which had been claimed and administered by Texas but was subsequently joined to Oklahoma to become the southwestern part of that state (see figure 1).

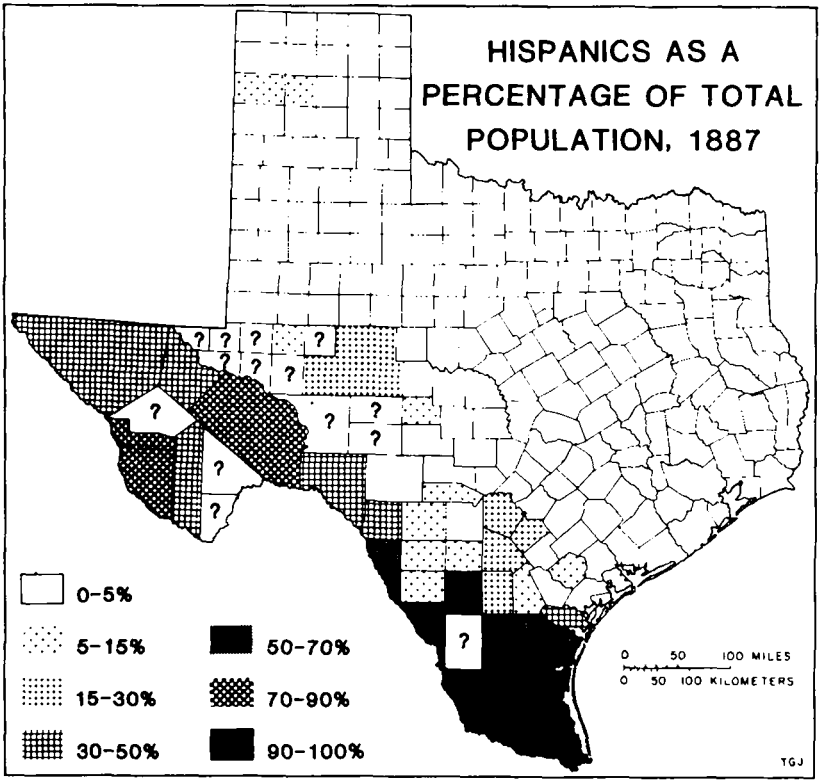

Figure 2. Hispanics as a Percentage of Total Population, 1887
Source: Texas Census of 1887, pp. 1-250. Only those dataless counties which would probably have had a population of 5 percent or more Hispanic are labelled with a question mark. For a complete list of dataless counties, see figure 1.

Shortcomings and Adjustments

The 1887 Texas census is not without shortcomings. No ethnic enumerations were made in fifty-three unorganized counties of western Texas.[5] Only a small number of Hispanics was overlooked in this manner, since the unorganized counties were thinly populated, containing an estimated total of only about 6,800 inhabitants.[6] Fully 2,000 of these, however, lived in Encinal, the most populated unorganized county. Later rejoined to Webb County, Encinal was dominantly Hispanic

in population, so that perhaps 1,500 or more should be added to the Mexican total from this country alone.

In addition, no ethnic breakdown was provided for the 1,790 inhabitants of Jeff Davis, an organized county bordering the Hispanic majority zone, suggesting the addition of at least 500 more to the Mexican total. Some 32,940 persons refused to provide ethnic data to the marshals, and, if the statewide proportion is followed, we can assume that 4.0 percent of them were Hispanic, adding another 1,500. No other noteworthy numbers of uncounted Hispanics were likely to have lived in the state.

On the basis of these adjustments, I would add 3,600 to the Hispanic population, producing a grand total of 83,433, or 4.14 percent of the Texas population. On that basis, one could project an Hispanic population of about 90,000 for 1890, a year for which the federal census listed 51,559 persons of Mexican birth in the state.[7] By way of comparison, the 1980 census revealed an Hispanic population in Texas of 3 million, or 21 percent.

A last shortcoming is the absence in the 1887 census of any ethnic data for towns and cities. Indeed, even the total populations of urban places were merely estimated.

Accuracy

These shortcomings aside, how accurate were the figures provided in the 1887 Texas census? A simple test was performed that suggested the level of accuracy is comparable to that of federal censuses of the late nineteenth century. Comparing the figures for the total Texas population in 1880 and 1890, a hypothetical 1887 total was calculated; one that would have resulted if the increase during that decade had been equal for every year. The figure thus produced—2,042,395—matched very closely the 2,015,032 listed in the state census, involving an "undercount" or "error" of only 27,363; about 1.3 percent. If that were taken literally, it would mean that about 1,100 should be added to the 1887 Hispanic count.

The basic accuracy of the census enumeration of Hispanics is also supported by existing studies of Texas population

groups and migration flows for the previous half century, based invariably on the manuscript federal census schedules. For 1850, two independent hand-counts of the Texas schedules produced almost identical figures of 11,212 and 11,401 for the Hispanic element in Texas.[8] To this number must be added about 2,500 for the El Paso district, which was excluded from the census, producing a total of about 14,000, or 6.5 percent of the Texas population.

The 1887 figures, then, suggest a growth of about 70,000 in thirty-seven years, coincident with a decline in the Hispanic proportion of the total population from 6.5 to 4.1 percent. For such a decline to have occurred, Mexican immigration would necessarily have been lower proportionately than that of Anglos, Afro-Americans, and Europeans combined. Migration studies reveal this to have been true. In antebellum times, primarily the 1850s, only 2.3 percent of Texas *white* immigrants came from Mexico, a proportion that becomes much smaller if the sizable black immigration of the 1850s is considered.[9] The Afro-American population of Texas more than tripled between 1850 and 1860, increasing from 27.5 to 30 percent. During the 1860–1880 period, Mexicans and other Hispanics made up 6.5 percent of the total immigration to Texas, not sufficient to recoup the proportional losses in antebellum times.[10] Moreover, trends during the 1863–1878 period showed that Mexicans formed a progressively smaller proportion of immigration in each successive three-year span, falling from 10 percent in 1863–1866 to 4.9 percent in 1875–1878. This suggests that the 1880s may have constituted another period of below-average Hispanic immigration.[11] In sum, a decline of Hispanics from 6.5 to 4.1 percent of the Texas population in the period 1850–1887 is consistent with observed migration flows.

L. L. Foster, editor of the 1887 census, defended its accuracy. The enumeration, he pointed out, was made by "tax assessors and their deputies, who will compare favorably in point of intelligence and ability with the average census taker appointed by the United States Government to perform a similar service." Also, he added with some embarrassment, the 1887

census cost "nearly double the sum fixed by the United States for similar services performed by census takers in 1880."

The only typographical error I found in the census occurs in the section on Atascosa County, where 810 Mexicans were incorrectly listed as "Italian." A recalculation of both the Italian and Mexican counts for the state confirmed that the error is confined to the Atascosa tables.

Summary and Conclusions

The 1887 Texas State census contains a unique and seemingly accurate enumeration of the Mexican American population. As a result, it should be regarded as one of the most valuable demographic publications relating to Mexican Americans to appear during the eighty-year period between annexation and the 1930 United States census. It is hoped that this research note will bring to the census the scholarly attention it deserves.

Notes

1. Oscar J. Martínez, "On the Size of the Chicano Population: New Estimates, 1850-1900," *Aztlán—International Journal of Chicano Studies Research* 6 (Spring 1975): 43-67; Richard L. Nostrand, "Mexican Americans Circa 1850," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65 (1975): 378-90; Richard L. Nostrand, "The Hispano Homeland in 1900," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70 (1980): 382-96; and Terry G. Jordan, "Population Origins in Texas, 1850," *Geographical Review* 59 (1969): 94-96.

2. L. L. Foster, ed., *First Annual Report of the Agricultural Bureau of the Department of Agriculture, Insurance, Statistics, and History. 1887-88* (Austin, Texas: State Printing Office, 1889). The census occupies pp. xl-lv and 1-318. I came across it quite by accident in the summer of 1981 in the North Texas State University library.

For more background on the rediscovery of the census, reasons for its obscurity, and other data it contains, see: Terry G. Jordan, "The Forgotten Texas State Census of 1887," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, in press.

3. Foster, *First Annual Report*, pp. xliv, 2, 187. Chileans were listed for only two counties. A few additional Hispanics, such as Cubans, are no doubt included in the category "all other nations" that appears for the state totals and for most counties.

4. In calculating this percentage, I deleted from the state total population of 2,015,032 all persons for whom ethnic affiliations were not listed. The resulting total was 1,973,495. It excluded all residents of unorganized counties and Jeff Davis County, as well as 32,940 members of families, "the heads of which refused any information" to the census marshals.

5. The unorganized counties were Andrews, Armstrong, Bailey, Borden, Briscoe, Buchel, Carson, Castro, Cochran, Collingsworth, Cottle, Crane, Crockett, Dallas, Dawson, Deaf Smith, Dickens, Ector, Encinal, Floyd, Foley, Gaines, Garza, Glasscock, Gray, Hale, Hall, Hansford, Hartley, Hockley, Hutchinson, Kent, King, Lamb, Loving, Lubbock, Lynn, Moore, Motley, Ochiltree, Parmer, Randall, Roberts, Schleicher, Sherman, Stonewall, Sutton, Swisher, Terry, Upton, Ward, Winkler, and Yoakum. These appear on figure 1 with a question mark.

6. Foster, *First Annual Report*, pp. xlix-liv.

7. *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), p. 606.

8. Nostrand, "Mexican Americans Circa 1850," p. 384; Jordan, "Population Origins in Texas," pp. 85, 96.

9. William W. White, "Migration into West Texas, 1845–1860" (Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1948), p. 20; Barnes F. Lathrop, "Migration Into East Texas, 1835–1860," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 52 (1948), p. 31. The total, achieved by adding the White and Lathrop figures, is 7,260 immigrant families, of whom 169 were from Mexico. The source was the 1860 manuscript census to which the "child-ladder" method was applied.

10. Homer L. Kerr, "Migration into Texas, 1865–1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 1953), pp. 72–75.

11. Kerr, "Migration into Texas," pp. 135–37.