



The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s

John M. Nieto-Phillips

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When the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, rumors abounded throughout the nation that the Spanish-speaking population of New Mexico secretly sympathized with the enemy. At the end of the war, *The New York Times* warned that New Mexico's "Mexicans professed a deep hostility to American ideas and American policies." As long as Spanish remained the primary language of public instruction, the *Times* admonished, "the majority of the inhabitants will remain 'Mexican' and retain a pseudo-allegiance [to Spain]."

This perception of Spanish-speaking New Mexicans as "un-American" was widely shared. Such allegations of disloyalty, coupled with the prevalent views that all Mexican peoples were racially non-white and "unfit" to assume the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship, inspired powerful reactions among the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico. Most sought to distinguish themselves from Mexican immigrants by emphasizing their "Spanish" roots. Tourism, too, began to foster the myth that *nuevomexicanos* were culturally and racially Spanish. Since the 1950s, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have dismissed the ubiquitous Spanish heritage claimed by many New Mexicans.

John M. Nieto-Phillips, himself a *nuevomexicano*, argues that Spanish-American identity evolved out of a medieval rhetoric about blood purity, or *limpieza de sangre*, as well as a modern longing to enter the United States's white body politic.



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