

# **Border debate evokes 'unjust' U.S. invasion; MEXICAN MIGRATION HYPED AS RECONQUEST**

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## **Body**

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More than 1 million migrants flood into the United States each year across a border cutting straight through what once was Mexican territory, a touch of history that haunts the immigration debate 158 years after the land changed hands.

The territory north of today's 1,952-mile border -- half of Mexico at the time -- was ripped away in 1848 after a U.S. invasion that ended with the capture of "the halls of Montezuma," Mexico City.

Ulysses S. Grant, who took part, called the invasion "the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."

The loss changed Mexico's destiny and still tears at the country's heart. Primary school textbooks harp on it. Intellectuals often refer to it. Museums are dedicated to it.

In the United States, some anti-immigration activists see migrants as a threat to U.S. land and culture, part of a Spanish-speaking invasion that will reclaim the American Southwest.

Their concern is fed by occasional Mexican references to the booming immigrant population as a *reconquista*, or re-conquest, and by the Mexican government's efforts to reinforce the migrants' ties to their homeland.

When hundreds of thousands of mainly Latino marchers turned out for a pro-immigrant demonstration in Los Angeles in March, Mexican TV reporter Alberto Tinoco sounded almost giddy.

"With all due respect to Uncle Sam, this shows that Los Angeles has never stopped being ours," Tinoco said on the Televisa network's nightly newscast.

Prominent Mexican writers Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Fuentes have spoken sometimes of a *reconquista*. Poniatowska says Mexicans are recovering their lost lands "through migratory tactics." Fuentes portrays it as a powerful northward thrust of the Spanish language that will enrich both nations.

It may not be on the minds of job-seeking migrants, but the memory of the Mexican-American war "is a very important issue in the bilateral relationship. And it's always kind of floating around in the background . . . at the

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diplomatic levels," said Ana Maria Salazar, a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense who now works as a political analyst in Mexico.

But ``re-conquest'' may be misleading. Before the war, most people in the Mexican territory north of the current border, from California to Texas, were Indians. They spoke little Spanish and paid little allegiance to Mexico. Only a few thousand Spaniards and Mexicans were living in the area when the United States took the 525,000 square miles under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo decades later, paying \$18.25 million in cash and assumed debts.

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