

BORDER TOWN

SUBVERSION OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN RACIALIZED STEREOTYPES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

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The stigmatization of Mexican-Americans in the United States can be traced back to racism following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and is continued by many forms of media. Representation of Mexican-Americans in print media through the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century has been extremely stereotyped, often criminalizing Mexican-American men, hyper-sexualizing Mexican-American women or portraying Mexican-Americans as savage overall. While written media can only describe these stereotypes, comics can illustrate them, placing comics in a unique form of print media. When analyzing Eric M. Esquivel's comic *Border Town*, the author along with artist Ramon Villalobos reinforce the criminalization and hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American men and women that could be seen as regressive; however, the frequent subversion of these stereotypes suggests a pro-resistance stance to anti-Mexican attacks. Ultimately, *Border Town's* pro-resistance stance to anti-Mexican sentiment can be seen through the subversion and reinforcement of traditional use of Mexican-American stereotypes in this comic. In essence, this essay demonstrates how late nineteenth-century germ theory, stigmatic criminalization of Mexican-American men, and hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American women, transferred from social contexts to comics that Eric M. Esquivel subverts in his comic *Border Town*. Fundamentally, *Border Town* challenges traditional anti-Mexican stereotypes in comics by including Mexican-American characters who question the way they are stereotyped, manipulate their stereotypes to protect themselves or another, and then become socially accepted by those they protect.

Comic book characters like Wonder Woman, Captain America, Batman, Black Widow, and Wolverine are common white superheroes seen in a comic bookstore or on the big screen. The absence of comic book characters of color, in general, is not seen as a societal issue because comic books are perceived as fun narratives for children. However, comics historically have been used by the dominant white culture to degrade and stereotype individuals they perceive to be lesser. Finding Mexican-American protagonists like Wildcat (Yolonda Montez), Blue Beetle (Jaime Reyes), or Green Lantern (Kyle Rayner) is difficult. Furthermore, finding research on Mexican-American characters in comics is not readily available. So, why focus on comparing past and present comics with Mexican-American characters? Analysis of Mexican-American stigmatization highlights white normative values that have foundation in racist ideology. For example, in the comic, *Border Town*, author Eric M. Esquivel emphasizes that “Human monsters. Strange invaders from a foreign land, consumed by hate and compelled by a curious compulsion to send Aztlan’s native people...back home’...” (Esquivel 3). The “human monsters” Esquivel alludes to is white culture, therefore, it is important to analyze the past view of Mexican-Americans in comics to understand how Esquivel both used and subverted stigma and stereotype to subvert white racism.

The struggle of Mexican-Americans in the United States can be traced back to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and continues today in many forms of media. For the purposes of this

paper, Mexican-Americans, as defined by the Smithsonian can be described as a group of:

“people [in the United States that] have a familial link to Mexico or Mexican culture... [including those] in the territory conquered by the United States in the Mexican-American War...[and] recent immigrants”. (Smithsonian 3)

Representation of Mexican-Americans in comics and non-fiction political cartoons has been extremely stereotypical often depicting Mexican-American men as criminals, hyper-sexualizing Mexican-American women, or portraying anyone of Mexican descent as savage. The ability of comics to portray these stereotypes both visually and textually suggests Mexican-Americans are continually stereotyped because of white American ethnocentric ideals following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, “that [ended the]... calamities of the [Mexican-American] war”(Yale Law School). When examining the comic *Border Town*, the author Eric M. Esquivel and artist Ramon Villalobos depict

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Mexican-American stereotypes in the protagonists Frank and Julietta as criminals, hyper-sexualize Aimi, and portray Quinteh as the “dirty” or “primitive” Mexican-American. However, the author and artist then subvert the traditional use of the aforementioned stereotypes to underline their continued presence in society today.

Ultimately, *Border Town* challenges traditional anti-Mexican stereotypes in comics by including Mexican-American characters who question the way they are stereotyped, manipulate their stereotypes

to protect themselves or another, and then become socially accepted by those they protect.

Racialized stereotypes of Mexican-Americans have a long run in print media and increased in severity following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This treaty ended the Mexican-American War and added most of northern Mexico to the United States. With the movement of the U.S.-Mexico border, many once Mexican citizens became U.S. Citizens on paper but not in practice. According to sociologist and historian David Montejano, “[white settlers] in the Southwest brought with them a long history of dealing with Indians and blacks” suggesting that the massive acquisition of land from Mexico would bring with it years of segregation, racism, and policies that would deeply affect Mexican-Americans (Montejano 5). The notions of racial inferiority of Mexicans by the by culture traveled to the Southwest where Mexican-Americans were seen as “peones” (Montejano 76) directly translating to peons. White culture labeling an entire group as peons suggests the view of Mexican-Americans as “dirty,” “inferior,” or “bestial”. Furthermore, The Mexican-American “peones” would become the baseline for the anti-Mexican sentiments (Montejano 76). The belief Mexican-Americans were inferior eventually transferred to comics and is expressed through stereotypes seen today. The following section will analyze how late nineteenth-century germ theory, criminalization, and hyper-sexualization was used to stigmatize Mexican-Americans and will review examples of the aforementioned stereotypes in print media.

The History of Three Stereotypes

White Americans labeling Mexican-Americans as “peones” in Spanish

suggests ethnocentric ideals that aided in the reinforcement of many stereotypes (Montejano 76). This section will focus on how the germ theory against Mexican-Americans was used to segregate them, the criminalization of Mexican-Americans, and the hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American women transferred from social contexts to comics, illustrating a continued form of oppression.

Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican-Americans in the 1850s to 1900s were criminalized and expelled from cities across the Southwestern United States. The criminalization of Mexican-Americans became so ingrained in Southwestern white culture that it can still be seen in comic book characters today, suggesting a lasting form of oppression. The deep-seated hatred of Mexicans following the Mexican-American war led to “[Mexican-Americans in great numbers being] driven from Austin in 1853 and again in 1855, from Seguin in 1854, from the counties of Matagorda and Colorado in 1856, and Uvalde in 1857” (Montejano 28). Many, if not all expulsions were under the accusations of Mexican-Americans being “horse thieves and consorters of slave insurrection” (Montejano 28), suggesting the hatred of Mexicans contributed to a mass criminalization of all Mexican-Americans. Through criminalizing an entire group of people, white Americans laid the foundation for the Mexican-American criminal stereotype still evident today.

An example of this dynamic is evident in the Frito-Lay company mascot in 1967. Frito Bandito perpetuated the criminalization of Mexican-Americans, therefore, continuing the stereotype from the mid-1800s. Brian Behnken and Gregory Smithers argue in *Racism in American Popular Media* this character was often seen during the 1970s stealing “a

package of corn chips and then [sneaking] off to lay in the sun and drink tequila” drawing from the criminalization of the 1800s and perpetuating the stereotype of the Mexican-American criminal (122). Although the Frito-Lay company eventually retired the Frito Bandito in 1971, the prevalence of the racial stereotype from the 1800s highlights the criminalization of Mexican-Americans and subsequent stereotype that became so ingrained in American society it was used as a revenue-generating icon (Behnken and Smithers).

Pop culture icons are nothing new to American media and racial stereotypes perpetuated in them are no different. Similar to the Mexican-American criminal stereotype, the “dirty” or “primitive” Mexican-American stereotype permeated into the dominant culture and is still seen today. In the years following the mass criminalization of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, the segregation of Mexican-Americans in the 1920s to 1940s was heavily influenced by the germ theory of the late nineteenth century. David Raney defines germ theory as “[non-white skin] traits [thought to be] infections.... casting [non-whites] as ‘dilution[s]’ or ‘pollution[s]’” to the white gene-pool (Raney 3). This theory aided in the establishment of the “dirty” or “primitive” Mexican-American stereotype that Dana Berthold suggests was achieved by labeling Mexican-American behaviors:

“that fall outside of, and thereby threaten the most carefully guarded categories of social classification including [the cleanliness of] races, classes, genders, and sexualities” making anything related to the word Mexican synonymous with “dirty” or “primitive”. (Berthold 10)

The influence of germ theory led to white Americans segregating Mexican-Americans to parts of town that

“expressed the social hierarchy [of the area]” (Montejano 168). Furthermore, the influence of germ theory made it so Mexican-Americans were only allowed to shop at certain locations at certain hours, and “were expected to be back in [the] Mexican [side] of town by sunset” (Montejano 168). The result of segregating Mexican-Americans denotes white Americans did not recognize their citizenship and established a social hierarchy that created “an Anglo world and a Mexican[-American] world... [where the only] point of contact [with white Americans was] ... the dusty fields” (Montejano 168) highlighting that white Americans viewed both Mexican and Mexican-Americans as “dirty” or “bestial” for working in the fields and therefore felt they deserved to be isolated, underlining late-nineteenth-century germ theory ideas. Germ theory acted as a way for white Americans to justify the segregation of Mexican-Americans which resulted in their feeling as if they are temporary guests in the United States.

When looking at comics, the otherization of Mexican-Americans and the feelings they had following their segregation is evident today in two ways. First, many Mexican-Americans feel like they are visitors. Through the comic “El Border Xing” published in 2018 by Jaime Cortez, the influence of germ theory and segregation from the 1920s to the 1940s is seen contributing to this feeling. On the bottom of page 113, the bold text font is shaped into the American flag. By itself, this image could be read as just another American flag; however, the words “En la frontera, (on the border) [Mexican-Americans in the United States] feel less like citizens and more like tentative guests” (Cortez 113) making this quote a profound statement on the feelings of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest an example of how the influence of germ

theory and the segregation of Mexican-Americans in the 1920s to the 1940s affects them today. The flag underscores how Mexican-Americans pledge their allegiance to the United States. When coupled with the text saying Mexican-Americans feel like they are visitors in the United States, this quote suggests the presence of germ theory which has become so engrained in Southwestern racial ideals it perpetuates the “dirty” Mexican-American stereotype today.

Additionally, by looking at Gus Arriola’s comic *Accidental Ambassador* the bestial nature of Mexican-Americans is suggested in a strip from May 1943. The main character in this strip, Gordo, is drawn as an oversized man known as the “greatest bean farmer een Mexico” with slick black hair even though Gordo is from the United States (Arriola). Through Gordo, Arriola reinforces the view of Mexican-Americans as giant dirty beasts by making Gordo’s stature too much for the donkey he is riding. Furthermore, when looking at Gordo’s nephew Pepino in the same strip, the idea of Mexican-American bestial nature is reinforced as this small child is working in the field tirelessly, again reinforcing this idea and alluding to the presence of germ theory. Although Arriola aimed to “introduce Mexico to his readers as to counteract

common misconceptions [of Mexico and its people]” (Fajardo 123), his depictions of Gordo’s large stature and Pepino’s toiling subtly reinforce stereotypical views of Mexican-American men as bestial. Together by comics highlighting the feeling of otherness Mexican-Americans have in the United States and their bestial depiction, the modern allusion to germ theory demonstrated that notions of racist ideology can permeate into a culture, causing lasting effects.

In addition to the racialization of Mexican-American men in the United States, Mexican-American women are hypersexualized with textual emphasis placed on their beauty and illustrative emphasis on their cleavage in comics. To understand hypersexuality in comics, I will outline three attributes the collective male gaze attributes to Mexican-American women and why the third attribute is so prevalent when the second if the most prized. Author Alicia Gaspar de Alba underlines that the “patriarchy assigns three attributes to the [Mexican and Mexican-American] feminine gender: la madre [the mother], la virgin [the virgin], y la puta [the whore]” (51). La madre represents the godly purity, reservation, and obedience to the father that women should aspire to



Figure 1. Gordo Seeing Color. Arriola, Gus and Robert C. Harvey. *Accidental Ambassador Gordo: The Comic Strip Art of Gus Arriola*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

the most prized. Author Alicia Gaspar de Alba underlines that the “patriarchy assigns three attributes to the [Mexican and Mexican-American] feminine gender: la madre [the mother], la virgin [the virgin], y la puta [the whore]” (51). La madre represents the godly purity, reservation, and obedience to the father that women should aspire to

be once they are old, therefore making women's purity a spiritual ideal that can be perverted. Whereas, la virgín is the physical representation of la madre in younger years that could have her purity corrupted and become la puta. Although there are three archetypal feminine attributes applied by the patriarchy, women in comics are often depicted as the hypersexual puta to fulfill male sexual fantasy or desire even though men want la virgín so they are culturally accepted.

The hyper-sexualization of women can be seen in Gus Arriola's *Accidental Ambassador*, where the women are used to pleasure the readers and characters in the text (see fig. 1). For example, in a strip from May 2, 1943, Gordo and his nephew Pepino discover that their comic is now in color and are exploring their new colorful world when they see three women in the distance, Gordo comments "eet's going to be fon" (Arriola) while gazing at the three women. Arriola's text from Gordo does not immediately sexualize women but insinuates that looking at women in color will be more fun than looking at women in black and white, suggesting women are sexual creatures for Gordo and the larger male audience to conquer and gawk at. Furthermore, when looking at the drawn image of these women from the 1943 comic strip, their hyper-sexualized caricature is emphasized by Arriola. Each of the women has the same face with form-fitting clothes that emphasize the women's breasts suggesting their innate sexual nature. Overall, Arriola's comic strips underline the lasting la puta stereotype and hyper-sexuality of women with Gordo viewing women as objects to conquer and drawing their breasts as the main aspect of their body to be viewed.

Analysis of *Border Town's* Main Characters

The comic opens with the protagonist, Frank, traveling to his new home in Arizona. The following day at his new school, Frank is met by another main character, named Quinteh, and the two quickly share a greeting before the main antagonist of the story, Blake, shoves the two apart. Later that day, Frank enters a class where he meets the final two characters, Julietta and Amy, before shouting that he is half-Mexican. Following Frank's outburst, Blake is told about it and challenges Frank to a fistfight after school because Blake is a white supremacist. During the fight between Frank and Blake, Esquivel introduces creatures from Mexican folklore seen as large demons that come to destroy the world. From this moment on, the comic focuses on the biracial protagonists Frank, Quinteh, Julietta, and Aimi who fight against the creatures from the Aztec underworld, avoid immigration issues, overcome racism, and fight to protect each other.

The stereotypes in section one both intentionally and unintentionally reinforce anti-Mexican sentiment in comics and printed cartoons. In Eric M. Esquivel's comic *Border Town*, the author and his artist Ramon Villalobos reinforce the criminalization, hyper-sexualization, and "dirty" or "primitive" Mexican-American stereotypes; however, these stereotypes are subsequently subverted through the main characters embracing them to then win victory over an attacker, highlighting the complexity of stereotyped race in comics. The following subsections will analyze each of the main characters individually to highlight the nuanced nature of the stereotypes' subversion.

"Dirty" or "Primitive" Mexican-American Stereotype

The usage of germ theory otherizes Mexican-Americans based on the perception of them as “dirty” or “bestial.” When looking at Esquivel’s comic *Border Town*, he uses racially insulting language that stems from germ theory, which reinforces the racialized idea of Mexican-American’s bestial nature. In conjunction with the artist Villalobos’ racialized drawings, the aspects of germ theory are carried forward to racialize the character Quinteh; however, the acceptance of his strength as a virtue later in the comic subverts the “dirty” or “primitive” Mexican-American stereotype.

Analysis of Quinteh’s biracial background demonstrates how Villalobos’ drawing of him reinforces the “dirty” or “primitive” Mexican-American stereotype that evolved out of the 1920s to the 1940s segregation of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. In the second issue of *Border Town*, there is a flashback to a conversation between Quinteh and his mother in which she tells him that “[his] Kiowa ancestors...would dance to push their own souls aside, and make room inside their hearts for spirits who didn’t know fear” (Esquivel 3). Through his mother’s encouragement, he puts on a luchador mask that fulfills the same purpose the Kiowa dance would. Years later in the first issue of *Border Town*, Quinteh still wears his mask when he is separated from Frank by the white supremacist, Blake. During the separation, Blake glares menacingly at Quinteh and asks Frank if “[the] incredibly retarded hulk” (Esquivel 9) hurt him. This scene reinforces the bestial nature of Mexican-Americans in two ways. The derogatory remark of calling Quinteh an “incredibly retarded hulk” (Esquivel 9) directly insults his bestial size and nature, mirroring the idea of Mexican-Americans as “dirty” that grew out of the segregation of from

the 1920s to the 1940s. Additionally, the depiction of Quinteh as inferior is enhanced though the artist Villalobos’ drawing him as an oversized man, with a large barreling chest, and dark slick hair. This depiction is similar to the image of Gordo seen in Gus Arriola’s *Accidental Ambassador* that racialized Mexican-American men as oversized with slick black hair, and dumb. Together the racialization of Quinteh and insult towards his intelligence emphasizes that this character is designed to be perceived as inferior to the white student, Blake.

Although Quinteh is stereotyped, near the end of issue one, writer Esquivel subverts the racialized depiction of Quinteh by having him save Frank. During an encounter with Blake, Frank is about to be shot before a supernatural demon police officer arrives to break up the fight by attacking Blake and moving to attack Frank. Before Frank is mauled by a demon, Quinteh steps in and places the demon in a headlock, giving Frank enough time to begin his escape. The racialization of Quinteh in this scene is still the same as before, and the germ theory idea that would see Quinteh’s bestial nature as “primitive” and useless is subverted through Quinteh embracing this strength to stop the demon briefly to allow his “new friend Frank” an opportunity to escape (Esquivel 20). Quinteh’s bestial characterization could continue to be emphasized by more derogatory remarks after he helps Frank; however, at the beginning of the second issue of *Border Town*, Frank comes to Quinteh’s rescue, underlining the acceptance and acknowledgment of Quinteh’s strength, therefore, subverting the traditional primitive brute stereotype that evolved out of late-nineteenth-century germ theory. The artist and author’s awareness that Mexican-Americans are often stereotyped as brutes in conjunction with Quinteh’s

awareness of his strength allows the stereotype of the brutish Mexican-American to be subverted, transforming Quinteh from a stereotypical brute to a stalwart defender.

Criminalization of Mexican-Americans

The second major stereotype in *Border Town* is the criminalized view of Mexican-Americans by white culture. Esquivel reinforces the criminal action through Frank's fight with Blake and Julietta's criminal actions and undocumented status. Although these characters are criminalized, the author subverts the stereotype by having both characters comment on their criminalization suggesting that to subvert and change a stereotype it must be noted.

Esquivel subverts the criminalized Mexican-American stereotype against Frank during his fight with Blake because Frank knows when to stop the fight and is not the aggressor, suggesting that white racists are the true criminals. Upon arriving at his new school, Frank interacts with the racist student Blake who thinks Frank is white due to his skin tone. However, later in issue one of *Border Town*, Esquivel illustrates Frank yelling he is half-Mexican (Esquivel 12). Upon hearing this, Blake punches Frank because "[he] misrepresented [himself which] embarrassed [him] in front of [his] boys" (Esquivel 13). This attack on Frank reinforces the idea of the Mexican-American criminal as Frank charges Blake, getting only inches away from his face and then agreeing to fight him after school. Frank's willingness to fight and making that known suggests the idea of the violent Mexican-American criminal in the United States. Esquivel continues the stereotype during the fight after school when Frank calls Blake's friends a "little gang of white-powerpuff girls" (Esquivel 16), illustrating a verbal attack

and reinforcing the Mexican-American criminal stereotype. Furthermore, Esquivel subverts the stereotype during the fight after school, when Blake throws the first punch and Frank retaliates afterward, again making the white supremacist the aggressor and the Mexican-American the defender. During his retaliation, Frank kicks Blake and exclaims he knows "what happens if [he bashed Blake's] brains out in the hallway on [his] first day of class...[because he knows] this from experience" before he stops the fight and turns to head home (Esquivel 17). Additionally, Esquivel solidifies the subversion by having Blake pull out a gun and threaten to shoot Frank, delineating that the true criminal is the white supremacist and making a social commentary that the criminalization of Mexican-Americans is a stereotype that has been perpetuated by racist bigots.

In addition to Frank subverting the Mexican-American criminal stereotype, the character Julietta could reinforce the criminal stereotype because of her undocumented status; however, Julietta avoids attention because she is aware of this criminalization and does not want any trouble. Some may say that her undocumented status reinforces the criminal stereotype because she is disobeying American law, but her existence in the story is primarily to underline the undocumented immigrant experience not to perpetuate the Mexican-American criminal stereotype. When Julietta is first introduced, she is a reserved and jaded teenager making her way through school. She is often seen making comments towards Frank trying to discover who he is and she could be seen as a secondary character; however, after Quinteh is hurt by the demon police officer that is going to attack Frank, Julietta picks up a gun on the ground and shoots the demon police officer. By firing a gun while undocumented, she commits

“a felony that could get [her] and [her] entire family arrested and deported” (Esquivel 21). This demonstration of her breaking the law could be read as another Mexican-American in the United States engaging in criminal activity reinforcing the criminal stereotype. Furthermore, Julietta’s criminalization is enhanced in issue two when she pulls the gun from her backpack to shoot a demon that is attacking her friends. This action ultimately reinforces the stereotype that Mexican-Americans in the United States will commit crimes and suggests that white Americans will criminalize her and other Mexican-Americans regardless of any defensive circumstances present because of white ethnocentric views of Mexican-Americans.

Although Julietta is criminalized in issue four, when giving her back story, Esquivel highlights the stereotyped view of undocumented Mexican-Americans by emphasizing Julietta’s undocumented immigrant experience. For example, in issue four of *Border Town* when Julietta discovers she is undocumented she withdraws from society because she realizes that as a “Latina. Black. And undocumented” (Esquivel 5) woman she will be stereotyped as a criminal or inferior. Julietta further subverts the stereotype as after committing her crime she yells at Frank who says no one will “give a fuck about [her] shady immigration status” (Esquivel 5) to which Julietta responds with “to [Americans, undocumented immigrants] already are [seen as a] ‘alien species’” (Esquivel 5). Through Julietta’s comment about her immigration status and the knowledge of her past, Esquivel’s subversion of the traditional idea that

Mexican-Americans are criminals who do not know anything better than crime and the commentary that the criminalization of Mexican-Americans perpetuates their otherization by white Americans. It could be argued that Julietta reifies the criminal stereotype because of her actions. However, Rubén G. Rumbaut, notes that “[undocumented] immigration is associated with lower crime rates and lower incarceration rates” underscoring that the perceived stereotype is not reflected in the real world (Rumbaut 2). Therefore, this statistic reinforces Esquivel’s subversion allowing the depiction of Julietta’s undocumented Mexican-American experience to make a larger statement than the perceived criminal stereotype.

Hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American Women

The third and final stereotype I analyze in Esquivel’s comic *Border Town* is the hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American women. Using text, Esquivel creates a scene that sexualizes Aimi, and Villalobos draws her with the reader’s view looking up her skirt. The hyper-sexualization of Aimi can be read as stereotyped; however, Esquivel has her carve an ancient Aztec symbol into her face subverting the stereotype as she destroys her beauty. Additionally, after she carves the mark into her face, Villalobos moves from drawing Aimi in a skintight skirt to a baggy sweatshirt and jeans, underlining the subversion of the hyper-sexualized Mexican-American stereotype by desexualizing the exoticness that is desired. Some could argue that the change in her clothing to jeans and a baggy sweatshirt is sexist,

...white Americans will criminalize her and other Mexican-Americans regardless of any defensive circumstances present because of white ethnocentric views of Mexican-Americans.



Figure 2. Image of Aimi Carving into Her Face. *Border Town*, Esquivel, Eric M., Ramon Villalobos and Tamra Bonvillain, Vertigo, 2018, <https://readcomiconline.ru/comic/border-town-2018/3/21>.

however, Aimi is sexualized because *she* looks “exotic”, not her clothing, so by covering up what is sexualized, Esquivel subverts the hyper-sexualized stereotype of Mexican-American women.

When looking at the character Aimi, her sexualization is seen through Esquivel’s sexually suggestive text and Villalobos’ suggestive drawings. In the third issue, Aimi is called into the principal’s office where sexualization begins with

the principal who, while carving an apple, tells Aimi she is “exotic [and] to tell [him] anything” (Esquivel 19). The first part of this encounter underlines the principal’s racism and sexual desire for young women and emphasizes the sexualization of this young Mexican-American woman. Esquivel continues to reinforce the sexualization of Aimi when she seductively takes the knife from the principal. Esquivel’s decision to have Aimi seductively disarm the principal by suggestively grabbing his knife underscores the stereotyping of Aimi and the perpetuation of stereotyping Mexican-American women. Furthermore, when looking at Aimi on page 20 of the same issue, we see she is sitting with her skirt pulled up, only covering her genitalia with her crossed leg. The artist’s depiction of her covering her genitalia sexualizes her for the audience, principal, and readers, underlining her hyper-sexualized depiction and perpetuating the hyper-sexualization of Mexican-American women.

Although Aimi is initially hyper-sexualized and perpetuates the stereotype of hypersexualized Mexican-American women, Esquivel and Villalobos subvert the stereotype by illustrating Aimi carving protective designs into her face and changing what she wears. At the end of issue three, Aimi takes the knife the principal was using and comments that “creepy old men like [the principal] have told [her she is] exotic” (Esquivel 20) underlining a sexualization unique to women of color denoting the sexualization is based on Aimi’s outward racial identity. Aimi’s comment on the stereotype emphasizes that she is aware of the powerful effect it has on herself, women of color, and men. After Aimi acknowledges the stereotype, she carves “an ancient Aztec glyph for warding off monsters” (Esquivel 21)

into her face causing the principal to writhe back in pain (see fig. 2). Aimi's action symbolizes the subversion of the hyper-sexualized stereotype through the literal destruction of an example of that stereotype. Furthermore, after Aimi carves the glyph into her face, her outfit changes to represent the subversion of the stereotype. In issue four, when we see Aimi again, Villalobos draws her to have long jean shorts and a loose hooded jacket illustrating that since she has subverted the stereotype her sexualization will end. Together with her symbolic destruction of the stereotype and change in clothing, Esquivel underscores the subversion of the hyper-sexualized Mexican-American woman stereotype.

The Future

The United States has a long history of anti-immigrant sentiment ranging from the "era of [immigration quotas] and regulation of 1882-1924" to twenty-first century anti-Muslim and anti-Mexican sentiment (Behdad 155). Regardless of the time period, Mexican-Americans become targets for racist stereotypes and immigration policies like those mentioned following the "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo." Writer Eric M. Esquivel and artist Ramon Villalobos break down the aforementioned anti-Mexican sentiment by subverting the traditional view of criminalized Mexican-American men, hyper-sexualized

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For now, we wait as only time will tell if subversive works like Esquivel's will comment on Mexican-Americans in the Southwest United States or if this population will continue to be racially stereotyped as a form of oppression.

Mexican-American women, and bestial nature of Mexican-American men in their comic *Border Town* by having the characters vocalize their awareness of their stereotype before embracing it to defend themselves from an attacker. The reinforcement and subversion of criminalized Mexican-American men, hyper-sexualized Mexican-American woman, and bestial depiction of Mexican-American men emphasizes how prevalent stereotypes are of Mexican-Americans in the Southwestern United States today.

Although the subversion of the stereotypes in this comic effectively makes social commentary about Mexican-American experiences in the Southwestern United States, we will never know if this subversion is continued in later issues of the comic due to its cancellation after Eric M. Esquivel was accused of sexual misconduct. According to Graeme McMillan of the *Hollywood Reporter*, "Cynthia Naugle.... wrote about being 'sexually, mentally, and emotionally abused' by.... *Border Town* writer and co-creator Eric M. Esquivel. The cancellation of *Border Town* and its last two issues is problematic as the only examples of subverting the stereotypes are in the scenes described, and the accusations against Esquivel only leave a representational gap of Mexican-American protagonist representation in comics. For now, we wait as only time will tell if subversive works like Esquivel's will comment on Mexican-Americans in the Southwest United States or if this population will continue to be racially stereotyped as a form of oppression.

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