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***Land Rights and Literacy: How Maestro Miguel López Struggled for
Hispano Autonomy in Northern New Mexico, 1883-1906***

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Abstract

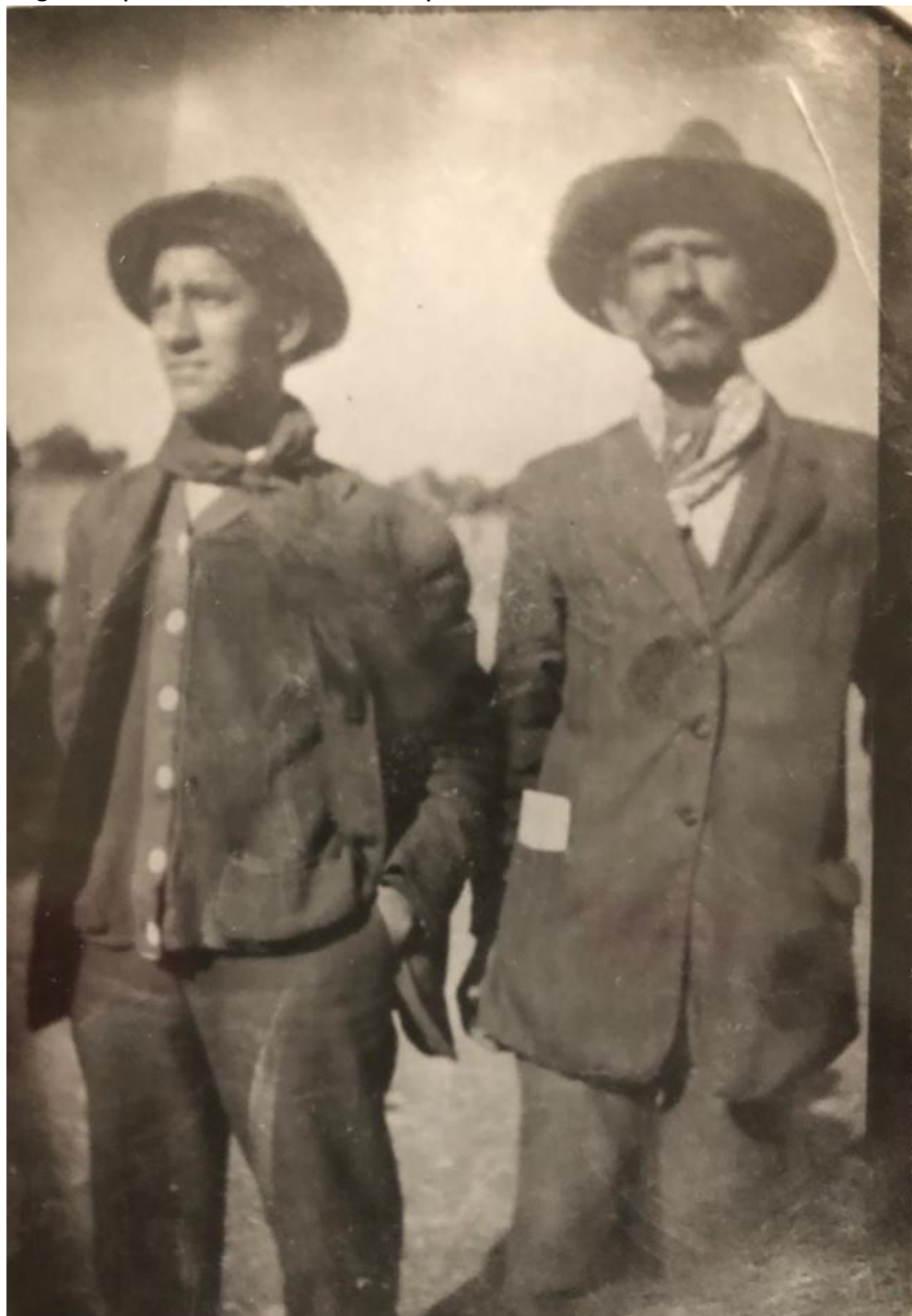
This article examines the land rights advocacy and early teaching career of Miguel López from 1883 to 1906. It underscores his work as a *Maestro Obrero*, or Master Workman, in the Knights of Labor (KOL) union in Colfax County, New Mexico. As a leader in the KOL, López advocated for the land rights and educational needs of his community. In addition, this article investigates how the struggle for land rights impacted and shaped López's early teaching career. It features the culturally relevant lessons López developed for his native Spanish-speaking students. Set against the backdrop of the struggle for land in the Territory of New Mexico, López's lesson plans and gradebook illuminate what teaching and learning were like in communities where Hispanos¹ controlled their schools.

Keywords: Hispanos; Mexican Americans; Land Rights; Education

¹ In this article, I use the terms Hispano, Mexican, and Mexican American. Hispano refers to Mexican citizens and their descendants with deep roots in New Mexico. I use Mexican and Mexican American when referring broadly to former Mexican citizens and their descendants in the American Southwest.

Figure 1

Miguel López and son, Teodoro López



Note: Miguel López (right) with his son, Teodoro López (left). Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Jennifer Pacheco, descendant of Miguel López.

Introduction

In 1890, at the height of the land rights struggle in the Territory of New Mexico, Miguel López (Figure 1), a Knights of Labor (KOL) union leader and public school teacher, developed a plan to defend his community from land speculators. López wrote a letter about his plan to Grand Master Workman Terence Powderly, the national leader of the KOL in Scranton, Pennsylvania, asking him, “What means can we take to free ourselves from the ongoing lawsuits that we have in the district courts,” and stressing that “the Land Grant Companies have taken over all the District Court lawyers in the Territory and are trying to wrong us badly” (López, 1890a). This was a compelling letter. It underscored how Hispanos were organizing against the threat of losing their land in the Territory of New Mexico. They not only joined national labor unions such as the KOL, but they also relied on public school teachers to help advocate for their land rights.

This article examines López’s land rights advocacy and early teaching career to understand how Hispano educators struggled for land and developed schools in their communities from 1883 to 1906. First, it explores how López became a teacher, community organizer, and KOL union leader. Second, it underscores his work as a *Maestro Obrero*, or Master Workman, in the KOL union. It explores the local, regional, and national influence of the KOL, with a particular emphasis on the union’s advocacy for Hispano land rights and public education in the Territory of New Mexico. Finally, this article examines the Spanish language lessons that López developed for Hispano students. Set against the backdrop of the struggle for land in the Territory of New Mexico, the teaching and learning that occurred in López’s classroom provide a portrait of what Hispano-controlled public schools were like during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I argue that López played an important role in the development of Hispano education in Colfax County, New Mexico. As a union leader who fought for Hispano land rights, his work in public schools took on special significance. As we will see, López understood how crucial literacy was in the Hispano land rights struggle. Literacy gave him the means to organize and defend his community from land speculators. In addition, López also understood that Hispano children needed to become literate in order to survive in their contested homeland. He implemented a robust and locally relevant Spanish language curriculum. As López taught rudimentary Spanish literacy skills, he also prepared Hispano students to recognize themselves

as full citizens of the United States and equal to that of their Anglo American peers. Given his work as union leader and teacher, it seems that López was driven by the idea that Hispanos had the same rights as Anglo Americans, including the rights to land, public education, and self-governance.

Methods

In this article, I used historical research and analysis methods. I accessed most of my data from the Miguel López Family Papers at the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. These data were handwritten or typed in Spanish and English. As I translated the Spanish data, I checked for accuracy using digital software. In addition, I also reviewed several translations with native Spanish speakers, including members of my family in northern New Mexico. I also examined the Maxwell Land Grant Company Records at the Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Finally, I collected digital data from the Bureau of Land Management, including land records, and used school reports, census data, and other sources.

Limitations

This article relies heavily on archival data created by López. Although the data illuminate the Hispano experience, they offer little to no information about other groups that also experienced land loss and attended schools in northern New Mexico. For this reason, I do not examine the experiences of Native Americans or Anglo American homesteaders and miners. Additionally, I also limit my analysis of several topics that do appear within López's records, including the history of the Knights of Labor in the Northeastern United States, debates over religious teaching in public schools, and Hispano opinions about English language textbooks. These limitations allow my article to emphasize important connections between land and Hispano education in northern New Mexico.

The Role of Land in the Education of Mexican Americans

Land has always been central to the Mexican American experience. As historians of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have detailed, the struggle for land has undergirded Mexican American lives since the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848. Historical literature also teaches us that Anglo American and European land speculators were cunning. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 entitled Mexicans to retain their property as citizens of the United States, land

speculators dispossessed Mexicans of nearly all their land in the American Southwest (Takaki, 1993; Gómez, 2007).

The impact of land loss on Mexican American education is well-documented in the historical literature about Texas and California. In his study about school segregation in Corpus Christi, Texas, Guadalupe San Miguel Jr. (1978) emphasized that Anglo Americans gained enormous political power when they acquired land from Mexican Americans. With the land and political power in their control, he explained, Anglos established a segregated school system where Mexican American students received a subpar education. Similarly, Mexican Americans in Brownfield, California, lost their land to Anglo Americans. As Rubén Donato (1997) explained, when Anglos acquired the land, they gained “control of the machinery of politics and the economy” (pp. 36-37). The land Mexican Americans lost in Oxnard, California, became the cornerstone for White segregationist policies. With land in their control, as David García (2018) documented, “Whites pursued policies and practices that aimed to position Mexicans as racial inferiors - tolerable as laborers but unworthy of anything more than second-class citizenship” (pp. 6-7). The historical literature clearly shows that when Anglo Americans gained control of the land that once belonged to Mexicans, they also acquired the political power necessary for shaping education systems to serve their own interests.

Little has been written about the impact of land loss on Hispano education in New Mexico and Colorado. Although the historical literature underscores how Anglo American and European capitalists dispossessed Hispanos there of nearly all their land holdings (Acuña, 1972; Bradfute, 1973; Deutsch, 1987; Limerick, 1987), the effect of land loss on Hispano schooling is unclear. Instead, historical literature centers around a surprising story about Hispano educational autonomy. For example, educational historian Rubén Donato (2007) documented how, in “San Luis [Colorado], Hispanos always had autonomy and never lost control of their county, their town, or their schools” (p. 126) and historian Rosina Lozano (2011), outlined how Hispanos in “New Mexico benefited from an autonomy that allowed them to control their territory in ways that differed from other regions in the West” (p. 179). Congress had prevented the Territory of New Mexico from passing bills to raise school funds, as Lozano (2018) explained, which gave “local communities nearly complete autonomy over what was taught in the schools” (p. 81). Finally, Jesús Jesse Esparza (2023) noted how autonomous Hispano communities developed schools that were “free from Anglo interference” (p. 8). The

historical literature on Hispano educational autonomy raises important questions: How could Hispanos experience land loss and at the same time enjoy educational autonomy? What was the relationship between land, political power, and Hispano education?

Although historians have examined Hispano land loss and education separately, rarely have they been considered in relation to one another. By examining López's land rights advocacy and early teaching career, this article illuminates a crucial relationship between land and Hispano educational autonomy. It was a relationship where land loss motivated Hispano educators who, in turn, organized and inspired their communities to struggle for land. In areas where Hispanos controlled their land and communities, they also controlled their schools and curriculum. Within this context, López's story is significant to the field of Mexican American educational history because it underscores the active role Hispano educators played in the fight for land and educational autonomy.

Hispano Autonomy and Land Rights Pedagogy

To understand López's work as a union leader and teacher, it is important to consider why Hispanos valued education and established schools. Here, I borrow historian Robert J. Rosenbaum's (1981) "tradition of autonomy" concept to understand Hispano education. In his study on how Hispanos reacted to Anglo American land speculators, Rosenbaum observed three types of behavior: struggles for physical survival, efforts to protect a traditional way of life, and adaptations to economic and political changes under U.S. rule. Within the context of this study, Rosenbaum makes a powerful point about how Hispanos practiced the tradition of autonomy, where the threat of land loss was viewed as a community issue, not solely as an individual concern. He notes how autonomous Hispano communities established organizations to "cope with matters affecting the community" (pp. 140-145). I hypothesize that Hispanos established and developed schools consistent with Rosenbaum's idea of autonomy. In other words, Hispanos responded to the threat of land loss by establishing schools where their children could learn how to govern themselves in their occupied homeland.

Within this context, Hispano educators developed and practiced what I call a *land rights pedagogy*, a term I employ for several reasons. First, I use this term to suggest that Hispano educators were very knowledgeable about the land rights struggle. Having grown up steeped in a constant stream of legal disputes about the ownership of land granted to their families before the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848, Hispano educators recognized the risk to their land and

communities. Historians have detailed at length the mechanisms by which the U.S. government separated Hispanos of their land. These scholars have established the Court of Private Land Claims confirmed only 80 of 231 Spanish and Mexican land grants and just 1,934,986 acres of the total 34,653,340 acres filed by claimants by 1904. Thus, 32,718,354 acres of unconfirmed land was added to the public domain and in due course transferred to homesteaders, railroads, and national forests. The historical literature also teaches us that Anglo lawyers eventually acquired more than 80 percent of the confirmed Spanish and Mexican land grants (Bradfute, 1973; Deutsch, 1987; Takaki, 1993).

Having experienced this process first-hand, the Hispano educators of this era were inspired to action by the struggle for land and the possibilities of education for Hispano students. For this reason, land rights pedagogy serves as an interpretive framework for understanding the teaching and learning that occurred in Hispano-controlled schools. Using this framework, we can hypothesize that the daily acts of teaching rudimentary literacy skills were deeply rooted in the struggle for land. We can see how literacy was essential, not only for understanding legal documents, including court case records, but also for asserting Hispano land rights through the written word. In addition, the land rights pedagogy framework also invites us to consider what teaching and learning were like in communities where Hispanos controlled their land and schools. As we examine Hispano-controlled schools, we can see how educators centered classroom instruction around the beliefs, values, and aspirations of their communities. Finally, the land rights pedagogy framework invites us to imagine the unspoken lessons Hispano educators taught students about power and privilege. On this point, López's story underscores a crucial lesson about land and education: whoever controlled the land also controlled the schools and the curriculum.

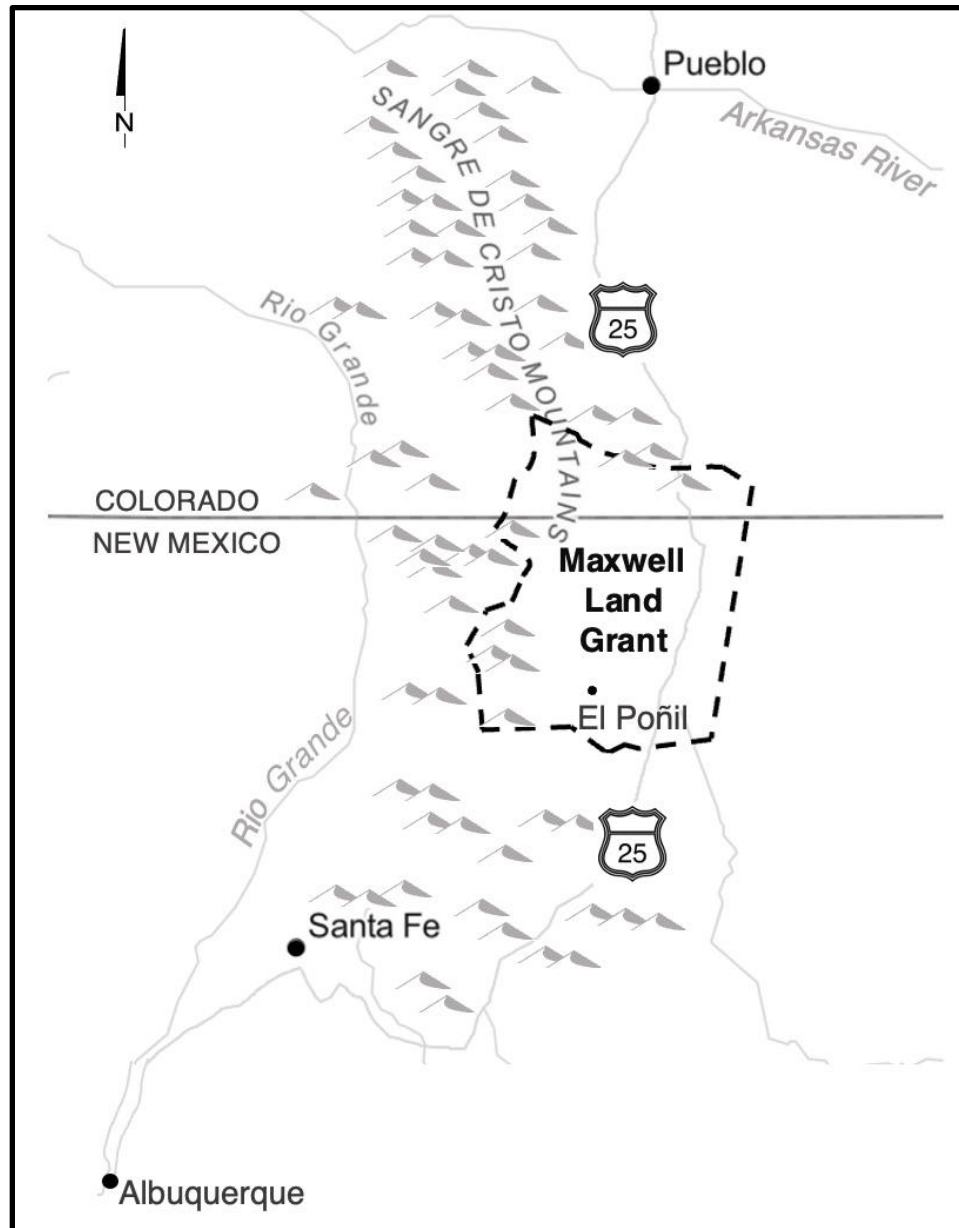
López Becomes a Teacher and Community Organizer

Born in the Barelás community of Albuquerque in 1867 (Federal Census, 1870), López and his family migrated to El Poñil in the early 1870s (Figure 2). At the time, El Poñil was a Hispano-controlled ranching community in the region once known as the Maxwell Land Grant. Hundreds of Hispanos settled in the area during the 1870s, believing that it was public domain of the United States and that it could become their private property. However, the powerful Maxwell Land Grant Company, a Dutch-owned joint-stock association, attempted to dispossess Hispanos from the homes, farms, and ranches they established at El Poñil (López, 1890b;

Montoya, 2005). Within this context, López completed his primary education (Federal Census, 1880), and in 1883, he became the schoolteacher at the El Poñil public school. (Nicholas, 1883).

Figure 2

Map of the Maxwell Land Grant in Present-day New Mexico and Colorado



Note: Map created using ArcGIS Online and adapted from Montoya, M. (2005). *Translating property: The Maxwell land grant and the conflict over land in the American West, 1840-1900*. University of Kansas Press.

López was uniquely suited to the teaching role in El Poñil. Because he grew up in this community, López was an insider. He could relate to the students who enrolled at the public school. In 1883, his roster included sixteen students, boys and girls, between 6 and 14 years of age. All of them were Spanish speakers from the community. They huddled in the one-room schoolhouse and studied Spanish literacy for 4 or 5 days per week (Nicholas, 1883). As a local, López understood how his students worked on family-owned farms and ranches while they were simultaneously pursuing their education (Federal Census, 1880). More importantly, he was sensitive to the ongoing threat of land loss and the role of education in their struggle for autonomy.

The threat of land loss overshadowed everyday life in El Poñil. It undoubtedly seeped into the teaching and learning at the local school. Although we can only imagine the sort of discussions López had with his students, his school report suggests that everyone in the schoolhouse had a story to tell (Nicholas, 1883). For example, Enrico Aragón, a twelve-year-old student in López's class, may have shared how his father, Juan Aragón, survived a shootout with the Maxwell Land Grant Company's agents (Elkins, 1873a; Federal Census, 1880; Nicholas, 1883). López might have talked about how his uncle, Damacio López, also exchanged gunfire with Company agents over El Poñil land (Elkins, 1873b; Federal Census, 1880). In addition, López may have told students how these very shootouts were retold and dramatized in courthouses where Company lawyers attempted to eject Hispanos from their land. Assuming López and his students talked about their community's struggle for land, such discussions would have revealed how Hispanos resisted land speculators (Maxwell v. Aragón, 1873; Maxwell v. López, 1873). Although we cannot know exactly what form these conversations took, it is not far-fetched to assume they happened. As the teacher in El Poñil, it was not only crucial for López to talk about strategies of resistance with students, but it also became critical for him to join and lead the struggle for land.

Given his literacy and unique position as a teacher in the community, López was someone whom Hispanos turned to for guidance. When the Maxwell Land Grant Company stepped-up efforts to evict Hispanos during the late 1880s, the El Poñil community turned to López for help. He was viewed as a leader in the land rights struggle because he was literate, well-respected as a teacher, and familiar with the politics of land ownership in the New Mexico

territory. These attributes made him a capable community organizer and a powerful adversary to the Maxwell Land Grant Company.

López became active in the land rights movement during the fall of 1887. He became involved when company employees aggressively pressured Hispanos to lease the very land that they had claimed and developed for more than a decade (Whigham, 1887a). Hispanos refused the Company's various offers, organized *juntas*, or community meetings, and decided how they would defend their land claims against the Company (Whigham, 1887b). Within this context, the Hispano community of El Poñil asked López to be not only their teacher but also a community organizer and land rights advocate.

Hispanos knew that the Maxwell Land Grant Company wanted to sell their land for profit. Indeed, the Company's records show how M. P. Pels, chief executive of the Maxwell Land Grant Company, wrote about removing Hispanos from El Poñil so he could sell the land to "some thrifty Scandinavian families ... of a well to do middle class" (Pels, 1887). In other words, Pels believed that Hispanos were in the way; they were not the sort of people that he wanted in El Poñil. Similarly, Company Manager Harry Whigham wrote, "There are many people today who are willing and even offering to buy the lands that these Mexican settlers are occupying" (Whigham, 1887c). To remove Hispanos from El Poñil, Pels, Whigham, and the Maxwell Land Grant Company's lawyers brought lawsuits against families who refused to give up their land (López, 1890a; Maxwell v. Lopez, 1889; Pels, 1887).

López Becomes Maestro Obrero for the Knights of Labor

López wrote letters asking for support from high-ranking government officials, including U.S. President Grover Cleveland (Montoya, 2005). In addition, he established a chapter of the *Caballeros de Labor*, or KOL, in El Poñil. This Pennsylvania-based labor union became popular among many Hispanos because it sided with them against powerful land speculators like the Maxwell Land Grant Company. As historian Robert Rosenbaum (1981) wrote, the KOL wanted to dismantle "the complex of bankers, lawyers, monopolists, and intermediaries that prospered at the expense of the people" (p. 102). Hispanos established chapters in many of their communities during the late 1880s. Collectively, the KOL protested the mistreatment of poor farmers, ranchers, and workers at the hands of powerful land grabbers. They also advocated for free schools in the New Mexico Territory (Arellano, 1974, 2000). For these reasons, it was very strategic that Hispano union members elected their local schoolteacher, López, to be their

Maestro Obrero, or Master Workman, the leader of their chapter in El Poñil (Knights of Labor, 1890; López, 1890a).

López wasted no time organizing the El Poñil KOL against the Maxwell Land Grant Company. Much of his early work as a union leader was dedicated to recruiting new members and establishing standards of conduct. Secrecy was essential for the El Poñil union to succeed against the Company. Everyone vowed to keep members' identities and union business confidential. López recruited a sizeable group of Hispanos. During the fall of 1890, he interviewed and admitted more than 50 men to his chapter in El Poñil (Knights of Labor, 1890).

The looming threat of land loss frequently compelled López to convene the KOL. They met as many as 11 times during the fall of 1890 (Knights of Labor, 1890). While there are no known meeting minutes, López's letters to Powderly suggest what the men may have discussed at their secret meetings. They undoubtedly talked about how to defend their land, homes, and farms in El Poñil. On this point, López wrote a letter to union boss Terrance Powderly asking for help. He detailed how the Company had filed lawsuits against several KOL members in El Poñil. López referred to the lawsuits as *desposesionamientos*, which underscored how land speculators and the courts worked together to dispossess Hispanos from their land. He wrote about how Anglo "land grabbers and monopolists" had corrupted the territorial courts, and López worried that the Hispanos in El Poñil would not have a fair chance to defend their land claims in court. He pleaded for Powderly's help and support against the Company (López, 1890a).

Powderly's response was disheartening. While he assured López that he would try to "frustrate the designs" of the Maxwell Land Grant Company, this was no more than a "lofty" promise (Ukockis, 2016, p. 66). Ultimately, Powderly could not prevent the Maxwell Land Grant Company from dispossessing Hispanos of their land in El Poñil. In the spring of 1891, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Maxwell Land Grant Company was the sole owner of the entire Maxwell Land Grant (Montoya, 2005). The decision was devastating for Hispanos. It meant that El Poñil belonged to the Company. Consequently, Hispanos began losing control of their land and community.

López began losing control of his classroom, too. Curricular expectations changed as the Company took control of El Poñil. Although López was adept at teaching Spanish literacy, the Company created a context where he was expected to provide an English language

experience. He was expected to use the English literacy curriculum prescribed by the Territory of New Mexico in 1891 (Getz, 1997). But López was not proficient in English. Consequently, he struggled to pass his annual licensure exam. As Table I indicates, his average standing fell from 70% in 1890 to 55.8% in 1893. This change in performance may have been a result of the new exam, which emphasized English. His scores were lowest in the English grammar portion. In addition, López's scores may have dropped as a result of his evaluators. He had always had Hispano evaluators, but after the Company took control of El Poñil, López's evaluators were exclusively Anglos, and his scores dropped. (Morrow, 1893; Strine, 1890). By November of 1894, López had stepped away from teaching in El Poñil (Morrow, 1893).

Table I

López's Teaching Recertification Examination Results by Year

Content Exams	1890	1893	% Change
Orthography	60	70	16.7
Reading	85	70.25	-17.35
Writing	90	90	0
English Grammar	50	20	-60
Physiology	75	80	6.7
Geography	72	40.5	-43.75
Arithmetic	75	40.5	-46
US History	55	40.75	-26
Theory and Practice	--	50.5	--
Average Standing	70	55.8	-20.3

Note: Sourced from "Teacher's Certificate to M. A. Lopez from D. L. Strine," by D. L. Strine, County Superintendent, Colfax County, New Mexico. New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Miguel Lopez Family Papers, Certificates; also from "Teacher's Certificate to M. A. Lopez from John Morrow," by J. Morrow, County Superintendent, Colfax County, New Mexico. New Mexico State Records Center and Archives. Miguel López Family Papers. Education Papers. Box 2. Scrapbook, 1883-1914.

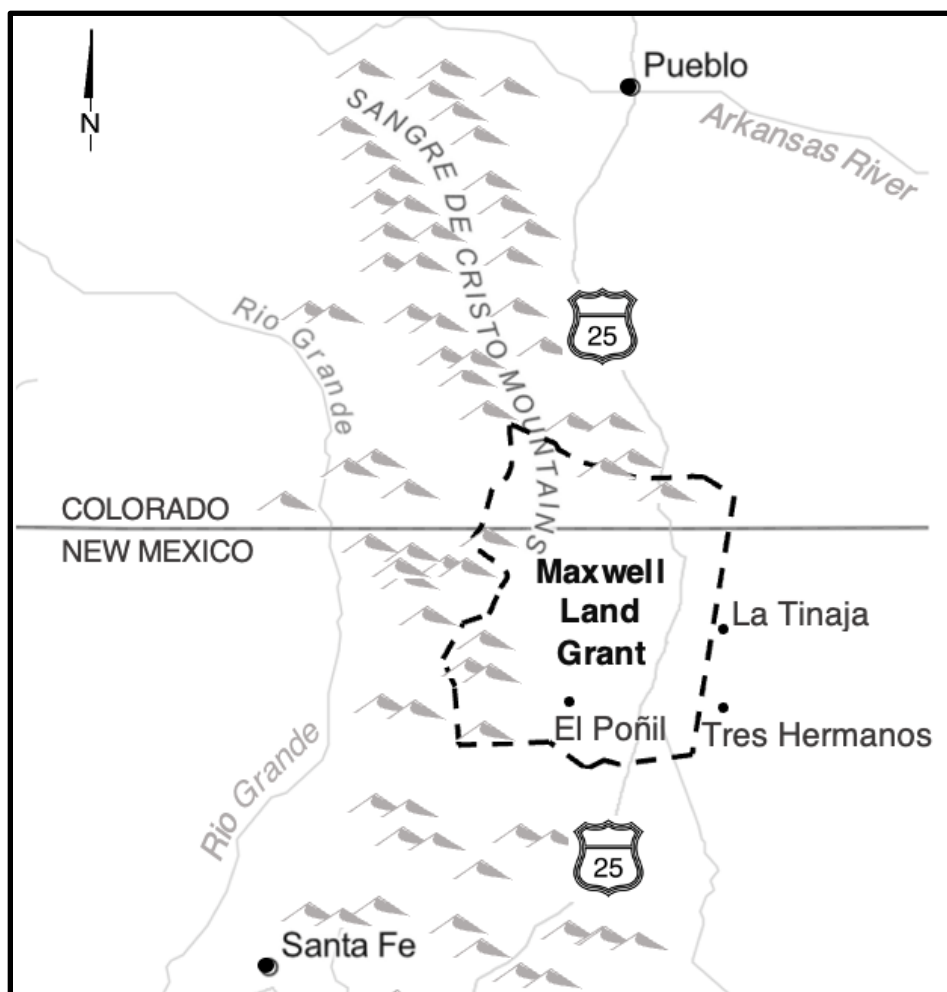
Hispano Educational Autonomy in La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos

Displaced from El Poñil, López and many Hispanos settled in areas just beyond the boundaries of the Maxwell Land Grant (Figure 3). They established communities in areas where they could still own and cultivate the land. In the communities of La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos, for example, Hispanos established homesteads and developed sheep and cattle ranches (Roosevelt, 1904a, 1904b, 1904c, 1904d, 1904e, 1905). Understanding the relationship between

education and autonomy, the Hispanos in La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos pooled their resources and established a school for their children. In 1902, they hired López to be their teacher (López, 1902).

Figure 3

La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos Near the Maxwell Land Grant



Note: Map created using ArcGIS Online and adapted from Montoya, M. (2005). *Translating property: The Maxwell land grant and the conflict over land in the American West, 1840-1900*. University of Kansas Press.

Student enrollment data suggest that the La Tinaja-Tres Hermanos school became popular among Hispanos in the area. Initially, López's records indicate that few students were ready when the fall term began in November of 1902. Just 16 students attended the first day of school. But enrollment grew steadily under López's guidance. By the end of November, he had

recorded the names and ages of 27 students in his attendance book (López, 1902). At the end of the school session in March of 1903, López's roster included 35 students between the ages of 5 and 19. Nearly two-thirds of his pupils were male and one-third female. All of the students in López's record book had Spanish surnames (Table 2). In short, the La Tinaja-Tres Hermanos school was a popular co-educational Hispano-serving public school (López, 1903a).

Table 2

Students in the Tinaja-Tres Hermanos School, Colfax County, 1902-1903

Total Students	Spanish Surnames	Non-Spanish Surnames	Male	Female	Mean Age
35	35	0	23	12	10.2

Note: Sourced from López, M. (1903a). Attendance Summary for month ending March 6, 1903. New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Education Papers, Box 2, Scrapbook.

To the extent that the La Tinaja-Tres Hermanos school was popular, it was also overcrowded. There were so many students that, by 1904, it became necessary for the communities to establish separate schools. From 1904 to 1906, López's records indicate that he taught exclusively at the school in Tres Hermanos, which maintained a healthy monthly enrollment of about 25 Hispano students (López, 1904a; López, 1906). These student enrollment data underscore the high value Hispanos placed on the education López provided. He taught students the literacy skills and perspectives that they would need to maintain control of their communities and shape their own futures.

Hispano parents and school directors trusted and empowered López to teach the literacy skills that their children needed to survive. Although López assigned students English textbooks, including *McGuffey Readers* (López, 1903f), his lesson plans did not include English literacy instruction. But this was not an issue in La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos. Anglos had little influence over the curriculum in these Hispano-controlled communities, and López enjoyed considerable academic freedom. With this freedom, he privileged a Spanish language experience. López created his own *composiciones*, or short Spanish sentences, to teach students

how to write in their native language. As López read these sentences out loud to the class, students repeated them chorally, wrote them on paper, and memorized some material. Occasionally, López tested students to find out how well they were progressing in Spanish. (López, 1903d). His writing exercises were unique because they were short, provocative, and based on students' prior knowledge. They were also challenging and meaningfully connected to students' daily lives in Hispano-controlled communities.

López often used familiar religious stories and imagery to teach students how to write. He taught students about the letter *n*, using the following sentence: “*La transfiguración de nuestro Señor Jesucristo fué en el monte Tabor*” [the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ was on Mount Tabor]. During the same lesson, López asked students to write “*Sobre el altar había un sinnúmero de candeleros de cera*” [there were a countless number of wax candlesticks on the altar]. As most Hispanos were Catholic, the students from the La Tinaja and Tres Hermanos communities were familiar with biblical accounts and altars. López used stories with such imagery to engage Hispano students as they learned how to write their native language (López, 1903c). Religious themes also underscored the centrality of the Catholic faith in the daily lives of Hispanos who had established autonomous communities in northern New Mexico.

Writing exercises also included important lessons about Hispano work ethic and discipline. His lesson on the letter *j* began with the following sentence: “*El que es perezoso en su juventud, no sabrá como emplear el tiempo en su vejez*” [he who is lazy in his youth will not know how to spend time in his old age]. The sentence provided students with good examples of the letter *j* in the words *juventud* and *vejez* (López, 1903b). Compositions about hard work and discipline underscored the mindset and dedication Hispano communities needed from their members. They were moral lessons, similar to the messages provided in the *McGuffey Readers* (Reese, 2011), but tailor-made for Hispano youth. These messages encouraged students to be moral, hard-working, independent, and faithful to God. In another composition about discipline López stated, “*Los buenos discípulos estudian sus lecciones con aplicación*” [good disciples study their lessons with persistence]. López wanted students to be self-motivated and hard-working (López, 1903e). These characteristics were celebrated in Hispano communities. Students learned the following Hispano proverb: “*Alazan tostado antes muerto que cansado*” [a racehorse would rather die than rest]. It was a line that Hispanos used to describe the sort of effort and determination it would take to complete a difficult task (Glazer, 1987; López, 1904b). Lessons

about hard work and discipline were important in an agricultural environment. They echoed the sort of rugged work Hispanos would need to complete to sustain their families and communities.

López also integrated familiar sights and sounds from the northern New Mexico landscape to teach new vocabulary. He asked students to write the following line:

Era un invierno muy riguroso y frío cuando los campos se cubrían con nieve y hielo, y en cuyo estado los emigrantes viajaban por entre los helados desiertos; y en su compañía iba una zebra que era el agasajo de todos los de la caravana [it was a very harsh and cold winter when the fields were covered with snow and ice, and in this state the emigrants traveled through the frozen deserts; and in their company there was a zebra that was the entertainment for all those in the caravan]. (López, 1904c)

It was a masterfully crafted writing exercise. Vocabulary words like winter, cold, and countryside would have been immediately familiar to everyone in the class. The words emigrant, caravan, and zebra may have been new vocabulary for some students. However, the sentence was more than a spelling exercise. It may have provoked students to ask important questions. *Who would dare to emigrate to New Mexico with a zebra during the winter?* was a question that López may have wanted students to ask. It would have given him the opportunity to talk with them about emigrants and outsiders who had settled in New Mexico.

López taught his students to view themselves as insiders and heirs of the land in northern New Mexico. “*Ya estamos naturalizados con los cambios de este clima*” [We are already accustomed to the changes in this climate.] (López, 1903e). In other words, Hispanos knew how to survive in the harsh climate because New Mexico was their homeland. On this point, López included exercises about familiar New Mexican foods. In a lesson about the *ll* Spanish letter, for example, López instructed students how to write the following line: “*El nopal que plantamos hace tanto tiempo, todavía no tiene ni siquiera un capullito*” [the nopal that we planted so long ago still does not have a bud]. Students probably had some fun writing and talking about the *nopal*, or prickly pear (López, 1904e), which was a staple food for many Hispanos. In addition to foods, López also taught his pupils to write creative sentences about the New Mexico environment using *ll*. They wrote the following line about the soft *murmullo*, or whisper of leaves in the wind:

Ocaciones sucedia á tan deleitable concierto un silencio sepulcral y solo se escuchaba el ruido leve de alguna hoja que cayera tropezando con las ramas formando murmullos tan suaves [occasionally, the concert was so delightful it would be followed by a melancholy silence and all that could be heard was the slight sound of a leaf falling, stumbling over the branches, forming such soft whispers]. (López, 1904d)

It was an advanced writing exercise but one that students of all ages could enjoy. As López read it aloud, 5-year-old Gerónima Salazar, his youngest learner, may have imagined the sound of trees whispering to each other as she scribbled the letter *ll* on paper. Gerónima's 8-year-old sister, Socorrito, may have whispered *murmullos tan suaves* (*whispers so soft*) while she carefully wrote the phrase. The metaphor in the sentence was likely engaging for their 12-year-old brother, José Brigido Salazar. Perhaps López challenged the older students to write their own metaphors (López, 1904f).

The curriculum included more than writing exercises. López also required his pupils to perform at community events. In 1906, he prepared them to give patriotic speeches about President George Washington at the annual Presidents' Day celebration in the village of Tres Hermanos. His students shared their unique insights about the president's life and legacy (Herrera et al., 1906). One student wrote, "*Washington da nervio a cada brazo Americano y consuela á todo corazon Americano*" [Washington gives nerve to every American arm and comforts every American heart]. The student also stated, "*El tiene nuestro primero y mas ferviente amor*" [he has our first and most fervent love]. Why was it essential for Hispanos to remember President Washington? The student emphasized that Hispanos were *gente Americana* [American people] and *conciudadanos* [fellow citizens] in the United States (Birthday of Washington, n.d.). This Spanish-language display of national pride was important. Everyone in the community could see and hear how Hispanos were defining what it meant to be "American" on their own terms. At a time when English was tied to full citizenship and "English-only" became a mandate (Nieto-Phillips, 2004, p. 199), these patriotic speeches became a protest. López's students were asserting that Spanish-speaking Hispanos were already authentic Americans (Gorman, 2020).

These excerpts from López's teaching records provide a portrait of what teaching and learning were like in Hispano-controlled schools. They also illuminate five lessons about

autonomous Hispano communities during the early twentieth-century. First, we see that Spanish literacy was a skill that Hispano communities believed their children needed to survive. As historian Rosina Lozano (2018) has explained, Spanish was a “language of governance” in the American Southwest (p. 14). Within this context, Spanish literacy gave Hispanos the means to govern themselves. Moreover, by limiting English and centering Spanish literacy instruction, Hispanos “rejected” Anglo American hegemony and claimed a future where their mother tongue and culture would be dominant (Lozano, 2018, p. 110).

Second, López’s teaching records show us that autonomous Hispano communities welcomed some Catholic teachings in public schools. Hispanos viewed the Catholic Church as an authority and champion of public education in New Mexico. The separation of church and state was a White Anglo Saxon Protestant idea that few Hispanos supported during the early twentieth-century (Getz, 1997). In addition, Catholic teachings provided an important foundation for instruction about work ethic and discipline. The third lesson we learn about autonomous Hispano communities is that work ethic and discipline were essential to the survival of the entire community. Fourth, López’s lessons underscored the significance of the land to autonomous Hispano communities. We learn that Hispanos were accustomed to the harsh climate, and they knew how to cultivate food and how to survive. In short, New Mexico was their homeland. Finally, López’s teaching records show us how Hispano communities grappled with American identity and the politics of U.S. citizenship. We learn that Hispanos rejected the erasure of their language and culture, and they claimed to be Americans with the same rights as other U.S. citizens.

Discussion

In this article, I argued that López played a crucial role in the development of Hispano education in Colfax County, New Mexico, because his work as an educator was intimately connected with the Hispano land rights struggle. By focusing on López’s union leadership, land rights advocacy, and early teaching career from 1883 to 1906, I underscored how López organized Hispanos to fight for their land and resist the Maxwell Land Grant Company. As *Maestro Obrero*, he organized Hispanos and prepared them to defend their land claims. We cannot overlook how, as an educator, López was trusted in his community, and that Hispanos relied on him to be an organizer, advocate, and leader in the land rights struggle.

We also saw how López equipped students with the skills they needed to survive in their homeland. López's unique Spanish literacy curriculum was instrumental. As we saw, he was driven by the idea that Hispanos had the same rights as other U.S. citizens. López not only fought for his community's land, but he also taught students to value their native Spanish language. Students learned Spanish literacy skills, and, at the same time, they learned to view themselves as Americans and full-fledged citizens with rights in the United States.

Using López as an example, this article hypothesized that Hispano educators practiced and developed a land rights pedagogy. By marrying the terms "land rights" and "pedagogy," my aim was to understand the relationship between the land rights struggle and evolution of Hispano education. Historians have examined Hispano land rights and Hispano education separately. But as we saw in this article, Hispanos struggled for land and educational autonomy simultaneously. For this reason, land rights pedagogy suggests that Hispano educators possessed a critical consciousness. In other words, educators like López understood that any threat to Hispano land was also a threat to the continuity of their communities in northern New Mexico. López responded to such threats by providing Spanish language instruction centered on the preservation of Hispano autonomy.

This article adds to the historical literature about the struggle for Hispano autonomy. Historian Lynne Getz (1997) described this struggle as a cultural "tug-of-war" between Hispanos and Anglos. She argued, "Whoever controlled the school and its curriculum had a hand in determining the fate of the culture and welfare of the people" (p. 12). My analysis adds to Getz's argument by underscoring the role of land in the cultural tug-of-war. I maintain that whoever controlled the land also controlled the school and its curriculum. López's story illuminates this crucial relationship between land and education. When Hispanos lost control of their land in El Poñil, they also lost control of their school, and López stepped away from teaching. But we also saw how Hispanos controlled the land in Tres Hermanos and La Tinaja. In these Hispano-controlled communities, López had the freedom to shape the curriculum.

In addition, this article addresses the peculiar absence of Hispanos in the field of Mexican American educational history. As several historians have pointed out, Hispano education has been excluded (Gonzalez, 1990, p. 4) "rarely studied" (San Miguel Jr., 1999, p. 202) and "underexplained" (Donato, 1999, p. 118). López's story uncovers important parallels between the Hispano experience and other Mexican American experiences in the nineteenth

and early-twentieth-century American Southwest. The newest historical inquiry illuminates how community-controlled education became a means of resistance in Texas (Barragán Goetz, 2020) and how Mexican Americans centered education in their fight for their civil rights in Arizona (Muñoz, 2024). López's story shows us that education developed similarly in New Mexico. However, this article also opens an important new avenue of historical inquiry. It invites historians to consider the relationship between land and the evolution Mexican American education.

Finally, "The Land Rights Pedagogy of Maestro Miguel López" contributes to the newest educational history research about educators of color. As historians today are exploring how marginalized and racialized educators shaped school curricula to subvert oppressive systems (Givens, 2021) and developed their own culturally relevant schools and school districts (Esparza, 2023), this article examines how Hispanos prepared their children to govern themselves in their occupied homeland. The new educational history research invites us to analyze how educators of color prepared students not only to resist oppression but also to exercise agency in shaping their own futures.

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that many historians are reluctant to draw connections between the past and present because such analyses can compromise the objectivity of their work (Donato, 2007). In this case, however, it is necessary to point out how the struggle continues. Today, the prohibition of race-conscious and culturally responsive curricula, including the banning of Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses, limited access to bilingual education, and cuts in grant funding for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) are just a few of the challenges facing Mexican American and Latinx communities. In addition, the consolidation and closure of schools serving communities of color, gentrification of Latinx neighborhoods, and redistricting of congressional boundaries also underscore the ongoing struggle for access to education, land, and political power. Within this context, López's story might be helpful to Mexican American and Latinx educators. López is an early example of a critically conscious educator who worked strategically inside and outside of the classroom so that his students would have the power to shape their own lives.

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