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 ***Sancho's Journal: Exploring the Political Edge with the
Brown Berets by David Montejano (review)***

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Juan R. Buriel

Note regarding changes to the book reviews section: The publishing world is undergoing a revolution in product delivery that no longer restricts the choice in book form to cloth or paperback. Electronic and print editions in various formats each require a separate ISBN, prices vary on a frequent basis, and there are increasing opportunities for self-publication that defy traditional bibliographical organization. Consequently, with this issue the editorial board of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* has decided to streamline the headers that introduce book reviews by removing ISBN, format, and pricing information. The rest of the publication data will be provided based on the print copies from which reviews are done, and in those cases where a book appears in electronic format, the publisher's listing will be employed. We hope the change does not produce too much inconvenience.

Sancho's Journal is a narrative account of the author's seven-months among the San Antonio Southside Brown Berets, along with critical reflection on the ethical dilemmas of ethnography, the politicization of *batos locos* during the Chicano movement, and the advancement of a more humanizing portrait of barrio life. The book, characterized variously by its author as narrative, journal, intellectual autobiography, story, ethnography, and failed dissertation is based on journal notes taken during David Montejano's "field experience" (19) while "embedded" (10) with the Southside Berets from August 1974 to April 1975. During this time of observing how its recruits acquired "political literacy" (9) and negotiated this with *locura*, a lifestyle defined by an underground economy of theft, drugs, and gangs, Montejano was made the chapter's minister of information in exchange for "hanging out" (ix) with them.

Montejano explains in the first chapter that following his affiliation with the Southside Berets he faced the irreconcilable ambiguities and inherent inequalities of the "ethnographic confrontation" (3) between

observer and observed, and thus discontinued writing the book, the dissertation he initially intended. Montejano describes *Sancho's Journal* as the belated third book of a trilogy—preceded by *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (1987) and *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966–1981* (2010)—that completes “a line of inquiry” (17) started over thirty years ago while a graduate student at Yale about how political consciousness transforms behavior.

The book contains ten additional chapters, the first seven providing periodic excerpts from Montejano's journal notes capturing his raw observations. In chapter two, “Regeneración,” Montejano introduces the Southside Brown Berets as a sixteen-member “second generation” (43) chapter comprised of veteran members and new recruits, gang members, *tecatos* (addicts), and mainly high school dropouts. Also discussed is the importance of ritual practice to member camaraderie, for instance handshakes and the wearing of the beret to symbolize *carnalismo* (brotherhood). Chapters three and four, “Por La Causa” and “Somos Camaradas,” consider the Berets' disciplinary measures to maintain appropriate public etiquette and rapport with other Texas chapters, and ultimately to contend with its members' competing “deviant and revolutionary impulses” (70). Chapter five, “A Dallas Vamos,” recalls the Southside chapter's attendance at the statewide Brown Beret executive meeting, and Montejano's observation of how the ideological [End Page 340] force of Chicano cultural nationalism unified the diverse interests of all the chapters. While in chapter six, “Negotiating Locura,” Montejano explains how the wearing of the beret “regulated code switching between ‘offstage’ or private behavior and ‘front stage’ or public behavior” (106) for the Southside Brown Berets, chapters seven and eight address member participation in illegal activity and concern over FBI infiltration.

The concluding three chapters of *Sancho's Journal* address the roughly thirty-year period following Montejano's field experience during which the ethnographic material was allowed to age and “become harmless” (174), leading to the gradual resolution of the ethical and political

dilemmas that originally paralyzed his writing. Montejano recounts his search for an elusive “bridging metaphor” (205) to make sense of the political edge between the illusory dreams of activism and the rough barrio realities many Brown...

ticians and civil rights activists ignored gender and sexuality discrimination in the 1940s. Ironically, the author gives little attention to the rationale for the inclusion of Mexican immigrants. He notes that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt believed in protecting non-citizens. Otherwise, my only recommendation is an expanded concept of "small-scale state building" that he argues the FEPC made possible. Using history, this is a thoughtful and analytical work showing the incorporation of Latina/os into U.S. society, albeit slowly.

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CYNTHIA E. OROZCO

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