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# Writing New Mexico White

## A Critical Analysis of Early Representations of New Mexico in Technical Writing

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In this article, the authors analyze early technical documents produced by the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration (NMBI), including “The Legend of Montezuma” and “Illustrated New Mexico.” The purpose of these documents are clear: to increase the number of white Americans to create a clear white majority when New Mexico became a state and thereby prevent the Mexicans from gaining power. In analyzing these documents, the authors use theoretical frameworks from studies in the history of business and technical writing (SHBTW) and critical whiteness theory to show how early textual representations of New Mexico reproduce racist constructions of native New Mexicans and represent whiteness as the norm.

**Keywords:** *technical documents; New Mexico; race; SHBTW; whiteness; Mexicans*

Technical communicators live on the border between science and humanity. They are the interpreters that allow the sometimes-warring factions to talk effectively to one another. Their job is to interpret and represent an often-opaque world of objects and ideas, making these objects and ideas accessible to interested readers through texts and images. In doing so, technical communicators traditionally have paid little or no attention to producing accurate or even approximately close portrayals of racial others. For example, many writers who produced technical documents on New Mexico

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prior to its gaining statehood are guilty of co-opting and stripping away the complex history and culture of the indigenous people of New Mexico (Jojola, 1996). To boost the tourism economy in New Mexico, historians and brochure writers either painted the native people as “the exotic Indian” or decontextualized them until they became “curious and quaint” (p. 44). Pictures taken of the natives during this time featured them in full dress, often with feathered headdresses and buckskins, thus fixing in readers’ minds the idea of the Indian Chief that was first immortalized on railway trains for the Santa Fe line and then co-opted by sports teams and commercial products.

Such misrepresentation of native knowledge and culture has largely occurred because of the dominating white American view that only written knowledge is valid. Thus, the oral history of the indigenous people of New Mexico did not gain legitimacy in the minds of many white Americans until it was recorded. Governed by the documentation process of oral historians, technical communicators have ostensibly transferred the copyright of this history from native people to the authors and publishers. To understand the dimensions of this documentation process, we analyze here some of the early representations of New Mexicans in technical documents. Using a critical whiteness framework, we suggest that early textual representations of New Mexico reproduce racist constructions of native New Mexicans and represent whiteness as the norm.

## Theoretical Framework

Our interdisciplinary analysis draws on two relatively new and emerging research areas: (a) studies in the history of business and technical writing and (b) whiteness theory. In the following sections, we outline some defining characteristics of these distinct areas and explain how we apply these theories to our analysis of early technical documents from New Mexico.

### Studies in the History of Business and Technical Writing

Studies in the history of business and technical writing (SHBTW) involve examinations of primary documents not only to contextualize them in a given culture and time period but also to understand how current knowledge production emerges and evolves from historical technical documents. Some of this work includes Richardson’s (1985) examination of England’s shift from a primarily oral culture to a culture that is dependent on the written word. This work shows that England’s eventual dependence on written business and legal documents contributed to widespread literacy

and the standardization of the English language in England. Later, Richardson (2003) continued to examine the evolution of business writing in England by examining the Gawdy family's business documents. Similar studies have been done on U.S. business writing. Denton (1985) traced the evolution of the modern American business letter by demonstrating that letter-writing manuals today draw on etiquette manuals of an earlier period. In another piece, Dillon (1997) analyzed historical records that considered the legislation of women's work schedules in the United States, shedding light on the historical and current role of women in the workplace. As these few examples indicate, such studies are "diffuse and interdisciplinary" (Douglas & Hildebrandt, 1985, p. vi). To date, there is no definitive treatment of or particular thematic focus on SHBTW (Rivers, 1994). But Douglas and Hildebrandt (1985) classified historical studies into two different categories: (a) studies of the didactic practices of a given era, including the rhetorical theories and devices supporting these services, and (b) studies that relate business writing practices and products to a wider historical context as part of the ongoing experience of an age (p. vi). Our study of some of the early technical documents produced in New Mexico can be classified as the second type of study in that we contextualize these documents within a particular local and national history to understand how particular constructions of race emerge in these documents as well as over time.

In contrast to some of the pioneer work in technical writing, which Longo (2000) described as having the potential to be linguistically "pure"—that is, able to gain the status of "linguistic transparency" in its ability to transmit accurate information (Rickard, 1910)—the language in the technical documents that we analyze here seems politically charged and embodies discourses that socially construct meaning onto people. To understand how race, particularly whiteness and Indianness, is constructed in technical writing, we draw from the theoretical approach of "the new historicism" (Dillon, 1997; Thomas, 1989). This approach to textual analysis "generally reflects the sensibilities of a post-structuralist movement that attempts to distinguish meaning from significance and to contextualize any expressive act in the network of social, cultural, psychological, and phenomenological forces that give it shape and purpose" (Dillon, 1997, p. 65). In our examination of original technical documents on New Mexico, we contextualize the language used in these documents to understand how New Mexico and its inhabitants were configured to attract white settlers to the area.

Our analysis of race in these documents is based on the idea that race is a social construction that is neither stable nor objective. Omi and Winant (1994) define race as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and

interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55). Similarly, we see race as being inscribed on different bodies at different times in history in the struggle to gain cultural, political, social, and material capital. Irish Americans, for example, considered to be members of an inferior non-white race when they initially immigrated to this country, eventually gained social and economic power and thus the status of being white (Ignatiev, 1996; Roediger, 2005; Takaki, 1993). In contrast, Mexicans, once considered white in this country, eventually became defined as members of a racial minority.

We see this project as an important contribution to SHBTW in that it sheds light on how historical technical documents reproduce notions of race in a given culture and time period as well as contributes to our ongoing constructions of race. We analyze representations of race through whiteness theory. In the following section, we provide an overview of whiteness theory and identify the specific tools we use to analyze race.

## Whiteness Theory

To analyze the reproduction of racist stereotypes and the normalization of whiteness in early technical documents on New Mexico, we have used some of the frames of white privilege that Gordon (2005) identified. These frames of white privilege are part of a larger theory of whiteness that underpins our social systems, especially here in the United States but also in other white dominated countries. This systemic racism is intricately designed to provide psychological, discursive, and material privileges to whites and to disadvantage people of color. The social systems include, but are not limited to, education, the job market, housing, social services, and the judicial system.

The acknowledgment that our social systems disadvantage people of color and privilege whites is nothing new. Traditionally, however, multicultural and racial theorists have centered their inquiries on one aspect of the issue—the disadvantages our social systems pose for people of color. In education, for example, multicultural education theorists have identified biases in assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, and testing, among many other classroom practices that are unwelcoming, and do not validate the knowledge, culture, or language of minority students in school settings. Although this research is resourceful in creating more educational opportunities for minority students, it has left unexamined the aspects of our educational system that secure opportunities for whites. To turn the lens away from theorizing about the disadvantages people of color often experience, whiteness theory attempts

to uncover the often-invisible mechanisms in our social systems that work to benefit white people. As Thompson (1997) pointed out, "By attending to how whiteness is constructed and maintained as a norm, whiteness theorizing displaces questions about the 'underprivileged' status of non-whites to instead expose the systematic *privileging* of whites" (p. 146).

People who study whiteness theory take different approaches at identifying and deconstructing whiteness. At the extreme are race traitors or white abolitionists who aim to completely rid themselves of their whiteness, arguing that the mere existence of race as a social construct provides logic and fuel to a social system that divides material and social wealth based on abstract physical characteristics. For example, race traitor Ignatiev (1997) claimed that

Whiteness has nothing to do with social position. It is nothing but a reflection of privilege, and exists for no reason other than to defend it. Without the privileges attached to it, the white race would not exist, and white skin would have no more social significance than big feet. (p. 1)

Although thinking that we could completely do away with whiteness or that whites could stop benefiting from the privileges whiteness provides may be an extreme viewpoint, whiteness theorists and practitioners generally strive to identify, understand, and disrupt the often implicit and mundane manifestations of whiteness. Thus, as Thompson (1997) put it, whiteness theory can be understood as

a distinctive political position—usually to the detriment of whiteness, for this new research addresses whiteness not simply as another ethnicity to be evaluated on its own terms, but as an oppressor ethnicity that has consolidated its appearance of superiority at the cost of others. (p. 146)

In this article, we identify representations of whiteness that are reproduced in early technical documents on New Mexico, using the frames of whiteness to determine the various ways whiteness emerges in these documents. The frames of whiteness we analyze include color blindness (refusal to see color), selective attribution (specific application of race), whitewashing (the removal of race for whites), and privileged language (the valuation of one knowledge or ideology over another; Gordon, 2005).

*Color blindness* is not, as we might expect from the inclusion of the word *blind*, the inability to see color. Rather, it is the refusal to acknowledge color—but only because doing so maintains the status quo for white society

(Gordon, 2005). Color blindness can occur on both an individual and systemic level but is universally problematic. Many whites advocate this nonseeing because it appears, on the surface, to advocate a merit-based system of reward, yet it rarely works to the advantage of people of color. By believing everyone has equal opportunity to various privileges, whites can feel comfortable in having their advantages—after all, they have earned them—and think of those who “have not” as lazy, stupid, or deficient in some other way. This refusal to acknowledge color also works to the disadvantage of ethnic people because it often translates into practices and viewpoints that do not recognize the obstacles people of color face or the distinct resources a particular ethnic or racial group may have to offer (Thompson, 1997).

*Selective attribution*, in contrast to color blindness, calls for a specific naming of race but only as determined by those in a position of power. The identification of Asian Americans as model minorities—the argument that Asian Americans set an example of how other minorities should live their lives, especially in the areas of education and business—is an example of selective attribution. The naming of Asian Americans as model minorities strategically draws attention away from the nuanced systems of racial discrimination that serve as obstacles to many ethnic and racial groups’ pursuit of success, including that of Asian Americans. Thus, selective attribution allows whites to determine who will have their racial identity acknowledged and when, by choosing whose voices will be heard and whose will be ignored (Gordon, 2005). A secondary effect of selective attribution involves the principle of inclusion, in which a race, rather than being named other, is included as part of the white group, as honorary whites. And using inclusion in conjunction with whitewashing can create a better sense of who we are and who they are.

*Whitewashing* most commonly involves removing differences between white people to create a sense of solidarity, but it can also mean vilifying another group of people as racists—thereby shifting the focus to others who really have a problem (Thompson, 2003). The term can also mean the rewriting of history in favor of whites. When history is the “official” story as told by the victors, a whitewashed history gives an inaccurate and often condescending view of those without power.

Finally, *privileged language* values one set of beliefs or values (usually that of whites) over that of another (usually nonwhites). Like selective attribution, this knowledge only exists as it is given to the reader and typically leads the reader to reach a conclusion in line with those in power. Deliberately excluding knowledge helps to keep the status quo. Privileged language is also used when a white writer rewrites the histories or myths of

others. By rewriting an authentic voice, the writers privilege their own voice over that of the original author and change the power of the story from one group to another.

In what follows, we demonstrate how these frames of whiteness were used to reproduce whiteness in early technical documents on New Mexico. The documents we analyze here were pamphlets produced by the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration (NMBI) and include the “Legend of Montezuma” and “Illustrated New Mexico” (Ritch, 1885, pp. 4-7, 21-90). These two documents are but a small part of the total archive of NMBI documents, which is kept by the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives in Santa Fe, and is available online through the Princeton Library (<http://library.princeton.edu/>). From a microfilm of the full archive, we selected the “Legend of Montezuma” and “Illustrated New Mexico” in particular because of their placement within the collection. By 1885, the secretary of the NMBI, Ritch, had got the hang of editing the pamphlets—particularly those dealing with the state as a whole—and was able to put together more cohesive pieces than some of the previous work. By this time, more surveys had been done, better maps had been made, and more illustrations had been donated to the cause of immigration to achieve statehood.

## **New Mexico Bureau of Immigration**

Under Spanish and later Mexican rule (and even under American rule), New Mexico proved to be marginal in national politics, a situation that remained largely until the arrival of the railroad in 1879. This connection to the vital transportation system that brought supplies and people across the country allowed New Mexico to have a greater market for the area’s resources. But New Mexico’s close association with Mexico and Mexicans proved problematic to those trying to lure Anglos—and capital—to the territory. Previous travel accounts written by Anglo visitors to the territory portrayed the area as barren and inhabited by superstitious racial inferiors who were alternately lazy or deadly (Gutiérrez, 1989). Clearly, these accounts would impede immigration to the territory. Thus, New Mexico’s legislation decided to take action, establishing the NMBI in 1880 to disseminate information about New Mexico’s climate, resources, industries, and economic opportunities for development as inducements for immigration to New Mexico. The NMBI sent information in the form of pamphlets (which were later collected into yearly books) consisting of annual and biennial reports from the secretary of the bureau; reports collected and written by county commissioners on

their counties' climate, minerals, and agricultural and water resources; and reports from various towns describing their population, geography, transportation lines, water and fuel resources, industries, climate, schools, banks, and hotels.

These documents, according to the secretary of the NMBI in his annual report from 1884, served as "a convenient means of answering letters of inquiry and of supplying strangers" (Ritch, 1885) with information about the territory, much like a modern day section on "frequently asked questions." These publications—referred to as pamphlets in the annual reports—were widely disseminated throughout the territory, with about 16,000 distributed in the first 2 years of the bureau's existence. An estimated 500,000 pamphlets were eventually distributed before the territory became a state in 1912, at which time the bureau was dissolved.

The success of the pamphlets, according to Secretary Ritch (1885), was "due to the concentration of effort mainly upon the general pamphlet which [he] sought to make comprehensive in description, convenient in classification, and profuse in illustration" (p. 6). This general pamphlet, which was longer than the individual pamphlets available on the counties, was made up of various reports, maps, and charts culled from the individual pamphlets. This pamphlet, titled "Illustrated New Mexico" (Ritch, 1885, pp. 21-90), was distributed not only through the offices of the president of the Bureau of Immigration and the NMBI (by written request) but also through the advertising bureaus of major railroad companies in New Mexico (mainly the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad and the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, who also underwrote some of the cost of the pamphlets and maps), the Interior Department at Washington, the Annual Territorial Exposition, and the Tri-Centenary Exposition, as well as on trains, public offices, state and public libraries, banks, businesses, and hotels. These outlets were also clearinghouses for other pamphlets created by the bureau, mostly detailing the various resources ripe for exploitation at the hands of an industrious immigrant who could use New Mexico's "coal, coke and minerals, to discover and develop its varied latent resources, and to encourage an energetic yeomanry to occupy the fertile valleys and grass-covered ranges, where health, wealth, and happiness are within the reach of the many" (Ritch, 1885, p. 8).

The New Mexico described in these pamphlets seemed to be merely sleeping, waiting for enterprising Americans to wake her from her slumber so she might give up her resources for their benefit—the bureau had merely to sound the call. All welcomed their arrival.

The pamphlets' purpose, according to the official documents, was to entice Americans "out west" by illustrating the myriad opportunities for wealth or homes in the Territory of New Mexico for "those willing to devote

honest, intelligent and persistent effort to the acquiring of a competency” (Ritch, 1885, p. 8). But Gutiérrez (1989) asserted that the real purpose of attracting immigrants was not to increase the wealth of the state but to increase the number of white immigrants within the territory before it gained statehood. The “territorial machine” made up of military officials, local prefects, lawyers, land speculators, and a few Spanish Americans to whom the territory was temporarily entrusted wanted New Mexico to wait for its statehood until Anglo-Americans were the numerically dominant group (Lamar, 1962). To this end, the authors of the pamphlets, who were highly praised in select letters printed in the NMBI annual reports, were not writing “a full and fair story of the climate, resources and geography of [the] Territory, and of the present condition of its people as to education, morality and obedience to law” (Frost, 1891, p. 10) but were in fact writing a whitewashed version to attract more white settlers to New Mexico and thus likely gain a larger white influence over government and business. If Anglos were to wrest control over New Mexico from the native Spanish American elites, white American immigrants were vitally needed. Thus, the bureau created and distributed 124 known titles, totaling some 500,000 items. The most popular of these pamphlets were collected in two books: *Aztlán: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico* (Ritch, 1885), which included “The Legend of Montezuma” (pp. 4-7) and “Illustrated New Mexico” (pp. 21-90), and *New Mexico: Its Resources, Climate, Geography, History, Statistics, Present Condition and Future Prospects* (Frost, 1894). Figure 1 shows an illustration from the latter book published by the NMBI. This illustration shows the New Mexico exhibit from the Chicago World’s Fair. Many copies of the pamphlets published by the NMBI were made available at this booth.

### “The Legend of Montezuma”

The first pamphlet included in *Aztlán: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico*, “The Legend of Montezuma,” is a retelling of the Montezuma legend as it has been “gathered from various sources and connected” (Ritch, 1885, p. 5). Briefly, this retelling of the Aztlán legend posits that Montezuma, the great monarch of the Aztecs, was born in Santa Fe of a virgin (who had consumed a pine nut given to her by the Great Spirit). Montezuma was an unpopular youth and came to his leadership position by chance—for while normally the cacique had been a man of great spiritual powers, Montezuma had none. But the day before the big hunt, during which he was to prove himself, the Great Spirit came to him and instructed him to put on the blanket and

**Figure 1**  
**From *New Mexico: Its Resources, Climate, Geography, History, Statistics, Present Condition and Future Prospects*, NMBI, Max Frost (Ed.), 1894**



New Mexico Exhibit, World's Fair, Chicago.

Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

moccasins his mother had given him before she died. After Montezuma was thus bathed and dressed, the Great Spirit conferred on him a rattle made of animal hooves that he could use to charm the animals to surrender. Because of these powers, he became not only the town's cacique, but eventually a great monarch. He later wed Melinche, a woman who had been selected for him by the Great Spirit. After a short period, Montezuma took flight on a great eagle, which had been prophesied to lead him to his future capital and metropolis, and headed south (see Figure 2). Wherever he stopped along the journey, he formed new towns and garnered great respect from the local inhabitants, who followed him "as the wise men of Biblical history followed their guiding star" (p. 6). Finally, the eagle landed on an island, where it began to devour a serpent while perched on a cactus—the sign that the Great Spirit had told him to watch for—and there he found his capital. He lived there in peace and prosperity until the coming of "the Children of the Sun," better known as the Europeans.

**Figure 2**  
**From “The Legend of Montezuma,” in Ritch’s *Aztlán:***  
***The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico, 1885***



LEGEND OF MONTEZUMA.

Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

This retelling is problematic for multiple reasons, including the conflation of multiple legends of origin into one connected narrative—merging the Pueblo, Mexica, and Tohono O’odham tribes’ various chieftain gods into one Montezuma. Bandelier (1892) explained that the prejudices of multiple authors caused them to change not only the spelling of Montezuma (originally Motecuhzoma in Nahuatl) but also the legend of Aztlán so often that even the Indians themselves accepted the conquerors’ retelling. The accepted version of the legend was the written version of the tale—privileging the white convention of the written word as truth over the Indian oral tradition. This version became so ingrained that eventually even the Pueblo Indians under Spanish rule began to recite the tale as their own myth.

This problem was compounded, Gutiérrez (1989) explained, because Ritch’s (1885) version of the Aztlán legend stemmed largely from Morgan’s (1877) book *Ancient Society*, which strove to replace the idea that the natives were “noble savages” with the idea that they were at the “bottom of the evolutionary scale that led up toward European cultural dominance and superiority” (Gutiérrez, p. 184). After studying Spanish texts describing Montezuma and Tenochtitlán, Morgan pronounced the accounts as grossly

exaggerated and asserted that he was best prepared to interpret what the Spanish conquistadores had seen. Thus, instead of relying on historical documents and narratives for information, Morgan selectively voiced his racist beliefs, further privileging the white version of the story. This version was then accepted as truth by Ritch, who put it to paper in “The Legend of Montezuma” (pp. 4-7), which was subsequently distributed on a wide scale.

Additionally, Ritch (1885) selected various parts of the competing legends to portray what Gutiérrez (1989) called the “rising importance of individualism to American culture as refracted through representations of the Indians” (p. 185). For example, in Ritch’s version of the legend, Montezuma is not depicted as a leader of a larger communal (or clan-based) society but as an individual, picked and led by the Great Spirit to a position of high leadership. Much like the beloved idea that any child can grow up to be president, in this legend, Montezuma becomes emperor by chance. This example draws from the logic of colorblindness, a logic that insists that when race and culture are eradicated from our perceptions, anything is possible. But we know that this version of reality is simply not true because of systemic forms of racism (e.g., unequal access to education, housing, etc.).

This skewed version of Montezuma is further evidenced through the Christian imagery and language peppered throughout the legend. Montezuma is portrayed as a Christ-like figure, born of humble beginnings to a virgin. Additionally, Ritch (1885) used language similar to the King James Version of the Bible when writing dialogue between the Great Spirit and Montezuma, liberally sprinkling in *thys*, *thees*, and *thous*. This language is incongruent with the rest of his writing, and he plainly used it as a convention to signal a conversation between God and man. Indians were unlikely to have used this language when retelling the legend, or indeed at all. This altering of the legend to appeal to the white reader is a whitewashing of history in that native legends, such as Montezuma, are only made intelligible to the extent that they have been assimilated into a white frame of reference. This whitewashing of native history is accomplished by another frame of whiteness: privileged language. By being assimilated into a Christ-like figure, Montezuma takes on white Christian values and is thus made comprehensible to a white, Christian readership.

Finally, at the end of the passage, Ritch (1885) included a triptych containing the state seal of New Mexico (see Figure 3). This triptych, a seemingly benign illustration that accompanies the last paragraph, explains far more than the details of the paragraph:

**Figure 3**  
**From “The Legend of Montezuma,” in Ritch’s *Aztlán: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico, 1885* (p. 7)**



Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

The tradition of the alighting of the eagle upon the prickly pear will be recognized in the coat of arms of the Republic of Mexico, as that upon which the latter was founded. The same appears in the seal of the Territory of New Mexico, a vignette of which has been happily brought out by the artist, with the difference that the Mexican eagle is nestled confidently under the shadowing wing of the emblem of our own nationality. (p. 7)

The artist may have drawn the image “happily,” but the image it portrays is rather bleak. The lone Indian (an individual) watches from the top of his pueblo as the larger American eagle overshadows and encircles the vulture-like eagle of his own country. To his right, a cowboy tames sheep and cattle with a whip as the bearded men to his left work the mines with the black clouds of industry rising into the mountains behind them. The Indian is watching peaceably and helplessly as he and his land are conquered again.

“The Legend of Montezuma” is a particularly blatant example of how the mythic history of the native peoples was “selectively appropriated, reinterpreted and selectively transformed to achieve concrete political gain” (Gutiérrez, 1989, p. 187). Using the frames of color blindness, whitewashing, and privileged language, Ritch (1885) created a legend that was palatable to the American audience for which he was writing.

## “Illustrated New Mexico”

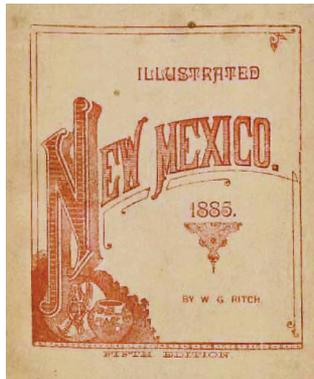
Gutiérrez (1989) made a good start of analyzing Secretary Ritch’s (1885) book, but he stopped with the “Legend of Montezuma.” When we subject the book as a whole to the same careful scrutiny, however, a more disturbing pattern emerges. Few passages in the book were actually written by Ritch—he served more as an editor, putting together individual pamphlets. The majority of the information was compiled by county commissioners from surveys and other reports conducted by county employees. But Ritch’s overall privileged and slightly arrogant voice as editor carries through the entire narrative.

“Illustrated New Mexico” (see cover page in Figure 4) is a problematic study for a number of reasons, the least of which is the length of the piece. At 63 pages, it is the longest of the pamphlets that do not deal with a specific county. Headings within the pamphlet include “Historical,” “Life and Property Secure,” “Railways,” “Area and Boundaries,” “Business Centers,” “The People,” “Immigration,” “Face of the Country,” “Coal and Iron,” “Minerals and Precious Stones,” “Agriculture-Horticulture,” “Live Stock,” “Tanning of Leather,” “Soap,” “The Public Lands,” “Homestead Exemptions,” “Timber,” “A Sanitarium,” “Mineral and Medicinal Springs of New Mexico,” “Religion,” “Education,” “Assessment and Collection of Taxes,” “Land Grants,” “Modernizing,” and “Opportunities for Manufacturing.” The pamphlet ends with a section titled “Adios.” Although all of these sections are worthy of further study, we focus on instances within the pamphlet that deal specifically with the native and Mexican populations. “Illustrated New Mexico” derives from only 1 year’s reports and makes up less than 10% of the overall NMBI collection that is available on microfilm through the University of New Mexico.

### Historical Overview

Ritch (1885) began the pamphlet with a historical overview of New Mexico, focusing on the inevitable coming of the Anglo-Americans and the unchanged domestic simplicity of the native peoples. In the opening paragraphs, Ritch pitted the “modern energy, enterprise and prosperity” of Americans against the “mediaeval conservatism, crooked stick plows” of repatriated Mexicans (p. 21). Racial stereotypes aside, Ritch also pointed out how little New Mexico’s population had changed since it was visited by Antonio de Espejo three centuries previous. That is a curious choice of historians because Espejo was not the “more reliable of the early explorers”

**Figure 4**  
**Cover of *Illustrated New Mexico* (5th ed.), 1885**



Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

(p. 38), as Ritch would have readers believe. Espejo's portrayal of the Indian population as quaint and having the trappings of civilization is, frankly, questionable. The friendly treatment he received from the Indians was probably not a result of strict hospitality. Reading through a full version of Espejo's account (see Blake, 1999), not just the one included in the pamphlet, the reader would find that the Indians usually ran in fear of the coming expedition because it was more likely to be a group of slave traders than a rescue party. This information is conspicuously left out, with the remaining passages portraying a people of "generous hospitality" and "great civility" (Ritch, 1885, p. 23). But the Indians were far more likely to have just been relieved they were not being sold into slavery, and so they gladly gave the Spaniard whatever he needed so he would be on his way.

Ritch (1885) stated that the account of Captain Espejo proves that the Pueblo Indian of 1583 was much like the modern (1880s) Pueblo: living "within the borders of civilization, in fact, if not ranked as such" (p. 23). But Espejo was discovered to be a semireliable source at best a mere 2 years after his expedition into New Mexico (see Blake, 1999). His penchant toward exaggeration and embellishment likely stemmed from his desire to portray himself as a man "with a pious purpose." But when he left on his mission of mercy in New Mexico, Espejo was mainly after gaining clemency from the crown for his murder conviction in 1583. He regarded

his services on this mission to rescue Franciscan friars (the narrative of which Ritch quotes from liberally) as being so meritorious that he lost no time after his return to Mexico in petitioning for a remission of his sentence, which he was never granted.

Why would Ritch (1885) use such a dubious and biased source for his pamphlet? He likely did so because Espejo's discoveries did more to "stimulate the settlement of New Mexico and the exploitation of its mineral resources than did those of any other of the early explorers" (see Blake, 1999). Indeed, in the section "Minerals and Precious Stones," Ritch commented that Espejo "frequently [made] reference to the presence of precious metals" (p. 38). Ritch seemed less interested in accurately portraying the native population of New Mexico than in setting up Espejo as a trusted source for future reference. By privileging certain information in his account of Espejo, Ritch ensured that the American reader of the late 19th century would not only view the native population as harmless but also would trust later accounts by Espejo that referred to possible gains in wealth. Ritch provided limited information in the pamphlet about the native population to keep white immigrants from viewing Indians as a threat. By using selective attribution—that is, strategically naming race when needed to affirm the stronghold of whiteness—Ritch could paint New Mexico as unsettled and merely awaiting whites' arrival.

Ritch again used the logic of selective attribution when describing people who had already immigrated to New Mexico. By stating, in the section "Life and Property Secure," that the "bad element floats with the tide of emigration, in a percentage larger than that which remains in the old and organized communities" (p. 24), Ritch acknowledged the long-held American belief of the unlawful immigrant, a concern that dates back to colonial times (Mears, 2001, p. 2). He went out of his way to acknowledge past indiscretions on the part of "rustlers and desperadoes" but insisted that they had made no demonstrations since October 1881 and that "the Territory is commendably peaceable and orderly, and people who desire to come [to New Mexico] are confidently assured that they will be safe in their lives, property and business" (p. 25).

Then, in the section "The People," Ritch (1885) further assured readers that "the people of New Mexico, both native and emigrants from the States, have frequently given substantial evidence that they are a well-disposed, patriotic and liberty-loving people" (p. 29). He backed up his view of the population by describing the arrival of the American general Kearny in 1846, which was unopposed by the native population. Thus, Ritch implied that the natives welcomed the American intrusion into their land because

they did nothing to oppose it, except for a minor incident when, “under gross misrepresentations by a few restless spirits, a speck of war was developed, which . . . was easily suppressed” (p. 29). As further evidence of natives’ love of liberty, he cited the territory’s contribution of 6,000 volunteers to the Union Army during the civil war, volunteers who “performed arduous, gallant and effective service against rebels and hostile Indians” (p. 30).

The conclusion Ritch (1885) reached seems to be common sense given his examples:

Thus at their homes, in legislation, and in the army have the people given evidence of their love of liberty and fealty to the government placed over them by conquest. The native population are not only law-abiding themselves, but is a reliable element to be employed in repelling Indian raids and suppressing domestic disorders. They are seldom guilty of heinous crimes. Most of the desperadoes who have heretofore infested the Territory were adventurers from other localities. (p. 30)

But in truth, these statements are half-truths and inferences at best. The native population was largely unaware that an American intrusion into New Mexico would occur until after it had already happened even though Kearney had sent a letter of intent to the Mexican governor of New Mexico (Occupation of New Mexico, 2004, p. 2). And the natives’ fundamental opposition to slavery likely stemmed more from a well-deserved fear of enslavement at the hands of their conquerors than from an honest “love of liberty and fealty to the government placed over them by conquest” (Ritch, 1885, p. 30). Their expectations were low because of their history of being mistreated by two governments. The quaint picture Ritch painted of the natives welcoming their like-minded conquerors who will bring industry and wealth to their land stands in contrast to their lived experiences. Again, Ritch used selective attribution, only naming qualities about the natives that would be appealing to white settlers of this land—qualities such as law-abiding, peaceful, liberty loving, and patriotic—and permitted them to believe that their presence and values would go unchallenged by native New Mexicans. Thus, Ritch’s use of language that resonates well with white values is an example of the privileged language that he used throughout this document.

Perhaps Ritch’s (1885) racial bias is most telling in the section on immigration. Here, he reasserted his belief that recent immigrants are “as a body . . . like the mass of those who came here from 1846 to 1880, intelligent, patriotic, energetic, economical, honest and orderly” (p. 30). The difference here is in whom Ritch is referencing. These immigrants (and the immigrants

whom they are like) have been immigrating to New Mexico only since 1846, so they are unlikely to be Mexican or Spanish; they are, in fact, white American. He followed this claim with a table showing the distribution and locality of the population according to the 1880 census (see Figure 5). Perhaps most interesting about this table are the categories into which the census divides the population: male or female, native or foreign, and white or colored. The distribution would indicate that the Spanish American population was included in the white instead of the colored category—an interesting inclusion to be sure. By including Spanish Americans in the white category, whites had inflated numbers, creating a false impression of their population. Furthermore, the breakdown below the chart designates the colored population as being Chinese and Indians and half-breeds. By whitewashing the white category—that is, by obscuring white traits so that the category of white included groups who may not have been previously identified as white—Ritch created an inflated presence of the white population in New Mexico, thereby making New Mexico more appealing to his intended white immigrant audience.

This logic of whiteness is practiced in this census as a means to produce an overinflated dominance of whites in numerical values and thereby maintain the security and prosperity of white ideology. Another way in which the whitewashing of racial traits in this census served to maintain the prosperity of white ideology is that it motivated Spanish Americans to vote for white candidates for public offices. Because the Spanish Americans were considered white, they would presumably vote in favor of white interests, a condition that was certainly more favorable for whites than for Spanish Americans (Montgomery, 2001).

In contrast to whitewashing logic, which is used in this census to obscure and not bring attention to race, selective attribution is used in this census to highlight and call attention to racial categories. These racial categories are used selectively and strategically to uphold and maintain a system of whiteness. This construction of census data calls white readers' attention to the racial demographics of the region as part of the unstated criteria that they may use to evaluate whether the state is an attractive site for immigration. Thus, the logic of whitewashing and selective attribution work in tandem in these census data, simultaneously highlighting race as a salient feature and obscuring the defining characteristics of racial categories. In other words, race is called on when needed to construct a notion, albeit a fictitious one, of white dominance.

**Figure 5**  
**“Distribution of Locality of Population According to  
 Census of 1880,” from *Illustrated New Mexico*, 1885 (p. 30)**

NEW MEXICO.							
COUNTIES.	<i>Total.</i>	<i>Male.</i>	<i>Female.</i>	<i>Native.</i>	<i>Foreign.</i>	<i>White.</i>	<i>Colored.*</i>
The Territory.....	119,565	64,496	55,069	111,514	8,051	108,721	10,844
Bernalillo .....	17,225	9,087	8,183	16,842	383	12,514	4,711
Colfax .....	3,398	1,973	1,425	3,144	254	3,375	23
Dona Ana.....	7,612	3,958	3,654	4,743	2,869	7,537	75
Grant .....	4,539	2,844	1,695	2,536	2,003	4,404	135
Lincoln.....	2,513	1,552	961	2,303	210	2,448	65
Mora.....	9,751	5,033	4,718	9,542	209	9,423	328
Rio Arriba.....	11,023	5,735	5,288	10,827	186	10,215	808
San Miguel.....	20,638	11,048	9,590	20,061	577	20,439	199
Santa Fe.....	10,867	6,023	4,844	10,209	658	18,388	479
Socorro.....	7,875	4,280	3,595	7,506	369	7,804	71
Taos .....	11,029	6,021	5,008	10,872	157	10,401	623
Valencia.....	13,095	6,942	6,153	12,919	176	9,773	3,322

\*Including in the Territory 56 Chinese and 9,790 Indians and half-breeds; in Bernalillo county, 2 Chinese and 4,492 Indians and half-breeds; in Colfax county, 17 Indians and half-breeds; in Dona Ana county, 5 Chinese and 45 Indians and half-breeds; in Grant county, 40 Chinese and 9 Indians; in Lincoln county, 2 Chinese and 3 Indians; in Mora county, 86 Indians and half-breeds; in Rio Arriba county, 799 Indians and half-breeds; in San Miguel county, 5 Chinese and 96 Indians and half-breeds; in Santa Fe county, 2 Chinese and 359 Indians and half-breeds; in Taos county, 583 Indians and half-breeds; in Valencia county, 3,301 Indians and half-breeds.

Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

## Resources and Spanish Rule

The next few sections of the pamphlet focus on the natural resources of New Mexico (the “Face of the Country”) and how those immigrating to the territory might adapt them for their use. The pamphlet mentions mountains not for their beauty but for their use as water sources and names each of the streams and rivers located within the territory. Then it provides an account of the coal and iron resources (directly comparing them in size, breadth, and supply with California’s output) and how they relate to the “supreme advantages for home manufacturing.” None of the passages seems to pose any particular rhetorical problem to the native population, other than that the passages might contribute to whites’ further intrusion on their land.

The natives are not portrayed favorably, however, in the introduction of the section “Minerals and Precious Stones.” Ritch’s (1885) interest in mining becomes more evident as he focused intently on the “mineral wealth of

New Mexico” (p. 38). He began this section much like he began the book, with the legend of Aztlán:

the traditions and knowledge existing among the village Indians of Mexico at the date of the conquest by Cortez was of a great people and of great mineral wealth in Aztlán, as the country far to the North, since named New Mexico, was known early in the sixteenth century. This much is true, although later historians remark at how cleverly the natives tricked the conquistadores into leaving them and journeying to the north for greater wealth. (Gutiérrez, 1989, p. 184)

Ritch seemed obsessed with the Spanish intrusion into New Mexico, first chronicling the journey of Cabeza de Vaca as he and his band of explorers wandered around New Mexico and California looking for Mexico. Ritch offered high praise for de Vaca and his party, describing them as stouthearted and persevering, wandering for 5 years with “nothing but the most subtle tact, indomitable will, dauntless courage, and endurance of steel” (p. 38)—qualities also shared, no doubt, by Anglo immigrants in their journeying to this new land of opportunity.

But Ritch’s (1885) flattering words for the Spanish immigrants stopped abruptly when he spoke of their previous mining enterprises in the territory. Although he acknowledged that the mines were previously worked under Spanish rule, he made a point of mentioning that they “were worked by the Pueblo Indians under duress, from which imposed labors [the Pueblos] revolted in 1680, drove their oppressors out of the country, and kept control of the same for a number of years” (p. 39; see Figure 6). Although the Spaniards returned a few years later, the terms of peace that they negotiated with the Indians stated that in the Spaniards’ occupation of the country, “the pursuits of the people were to be confined to agriculture and stock” (p. 40). Thus, mining had been largely ignored for close to 200 years.

Ritch’s (1885) mention of the Spanish oppressors served a twofold purpose. First, it allowed white people to feel better about coming into the land and staking claims on various mines. After all, the Indians wanted nothing to do with mining, so they should be able to come in and exploit the unclaimed land. Indeed, Ritch “[did] not hesitate to predict that New Mexico is upon the eve of one of the most remarkable seasons of prosperity, as represented in its mineral resources, that has ever fallen to the lot of mineral-bearing section” (p. 40). All that remained, then, was to have able-bodied people to process the resources. Second, by mentioning a villainous other, that of the Spaniards, Ritch assured Americans coming to the territory that no matter how they treated the natives, they would certainly treat them better than the

**Figure 6**  
From "Minerals & Precious Stones," *Illustrated New Mexico*, 1885

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ENSLAVED IN THE MINES.

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Source: Courtesy of New Mexico State Records Center & Archives (Collection 1959-114).

Spaniards had. Through this whitewashing of the history of New Mexico, Ritch was able to create a land of endless possibility for entrepreneurial whites. Certainly, the coming of white technology and industry was certain to help the “simple” people subside on their agricultural prowess.

And what about their agricultural prowess? Ritch (1885) did not think highly of the natives’ technique, describing it as “surface scratching of the Mexican crooked stick” (p. 51). Concerning agriculture, Ritch believed the natives had much to learn from the “scientific farming” techniques of the American who could

plan with all the certainty of a mechanic. He is the chemist whose laboratory is a certain area of land; everything but the water is at hand—the bright sun, the potash, and other valuable mineral ingredients (not washed out of the soil by centuries of rain); his climate secures him always from an excess of moisture and what nature fails to yield—greater or less, according to the season—the farmer supplies from his irrigating canal. (p. 50)

Ritch used scientific or what could be classified as privileged language here to tap into white American values. Because white Americans largely considered science as truth, he privileged the white farmers’ methods in the language of science. Additionally, because white Americans tended to deem science as color-blind, a method that gains results regardless of the users, Ritch constructed the techniques employed by the natives as “crude and improvident” in comparison to that of the scientifically empowered American farmer. Because Indians did not use what white Americans considered the latest scientific methods, white immigrants could justify taking over the land so that it could be used properly.

The remaining chapters of the pamphlet make only a few references to the natives in discussing the opportunities offered by the natural resources of the country (“Live Stock,” “Timber,” “Sanitarium,” etc.). In fact, the “Education” and “Religion” sections are noteworthy in their failure to mention race except for a passing reference to the number of Indians in various churches or schools. Ritch (1885) concluded with the section “Opportunities for Manufacturing.” Although he did not mention the native population (except as it pertained to manufacturing), he did make this interesting statement:

It is the glory of modern civilization to exalt every social value, to demolish every social wall or partition between the liberal and useful arts, to shed the light of science on the industrial processes, and to bring all the honest avocations of men and corporations into harmonious action. (p. 83)

Here Ritch referred directly to the American idea of manifest destiny—the need of white Americans to traverse across the nation and make it one large resource for their sole exploitation. This idea, of course, fails to take into account the indigenous persons in a targeted area. Should their social walls be broken down and their cultures assimilated as well? The answer is yes but only as necessary to suit whites' purposes. Whites' inclusion of these indigenous groups of people is conditional and often fleeting, as they may include one group for purposes of population census and government (e.g., Spanish Americans) but exclude another as being too separate (e.g., Indians and Chinese). Individual and communal history may be rewritten to favor the conquerors, as in "The Legend of Montezuma," until no trace of the original story remains even in the folklore of the native culture. Clearly, the harmonious action favors white people.

## Conclusion

These artifacts of technical writing, intended to bring immigrants to New Mexico, served their purpose well. In 1850, only 4 years after its annexation by the United States, New Mexico had a population of roughly 60,000 people (mostly Mexican). But by 1910, New Mexico was home to 327,301 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 1910). With more than half a million pamphlets distributed throughout the life span of the NMBI, the version of New Mexico's history and resources recorded in these pamphlets undoubtedly had a large impact on the native people living within the borders, as well as on the white immigrants who made New Mexico their home. By closely examining these technical documents, we can see that they contain various frames of whiteness that construct native New Mexicans, on one hand, as absent, insignificant, simpleminded, and marginal to New Mexico's history and white immigrants, on the other hand, as dominant, resourceful, intelligent, and thus entitled to take ownership of this land. This construction of race in these documents reproduces the idea that whites are at the center of U.S. history—that history does not begin until whites' arrival or that history does not count until it is recorded by white historians. Thus, these documents give life and sustenance to the concept of whiteness by constructing and manipulating our social system to the benefit of whites.

As our analysis shows, whiteness is not always easy to recognize in its various manifestations. Considering the long-held and mostly white belief that recorded history is fact, we can assume that readers of these technical documents believe what they read without questioning the contents' legitimacy.

Thus, in reading these technical documents, readers unwittingly acquire a skewed version of reality that is largely uncontested.

Given the inherent “truthful” status of technical documents, technical communicators must take care how they reproduce notions of race in their documents. To be critically attentive to race, then, technical communicators must realize that racism and whiteness are not concepts that we can just eradicate from our daily existence or knowledge construction. Rather, racism is a systemic, societal, institutional, omnipresent, and epistemologically embedded phenomenon that runs through every facet of our lives (Akintunde, 1999). Thus, we cannot reasonably believe that we can separate ourselves from and refrain from contributing to racism or that whites can stop benefiting from the workings of whiteness. To this extent, we also cannot reasonably believe that technical communicators can produce documents outside, and completely free from, the racial logic that informs our everyday lives. But technical communicators can reveal and disrupt many of the deceptively subtle yet powerful manifestations of whiteness. We suggest that technical communicators should be hypersensitive to the various ways whiteness can invariably and inconspicuously be engrained in technical documents. By identifying frames of whiteness (Gordon, 2005) that operate in technical documents, such as color blindness, selective attribution, whitewashing, and privileged language, technical writers may be able to identify such fabrications of whiteness in their own as well as in others’ documents. This process of identifying the obvious but also the subtle forms of whiteness is a necessary step toward deconstructing and demystifying the power of whiteness.

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