**Josiah Gregg Unit Lesson 7**

**Culture: Languages, Food, and Stereotyping**

**Languages (Original Version)**

Bent’s Fort served as an intersection of not only trade, but of cultures. Mastery of multiple languages became essential to peaceful relations among these migrating societies. Gregg remarked, “It is seldom that such a variety of ingredients are found mixed up in so small a compass. Here were the representatives of seven distinct nations, each speaking his own native language, which produced at times a very respectable jumble of discordant sounds. There was one Frenchman whose volubility of tongue and curious gesticulations contrasted very strangely with the frigidity of two phlegmatic wanderers from Germany; while the calm eccentricity of two Polish exiles, the stoical look of two sons of the desert (the creek already spoken of, and a Chickasaw), and the pantomimic gestures of sundry loquacious Mexicans contributed in no small degree to heighten the effects of the picture” (176-177). Interestingly, Gregg blends the entire soundscape into a lingual whole and pairs it with its associated body language.

While tribal nations often learned additional languages including Spanish and English, many chose sign language for intertribal communication. Gregg observes, “Our communications were carried on entirely by signs; yet we understood them perfectly to say that there were immense numbers of Indians ahead upon the Cimarron River, whom they described by symbolic language to be Blackfeet and Comanches” (62).

The Santa Fe Trail brought Mexican merchants and goods from Mexico and New Mexico northeastward to St. Louis, Missouri. Without knowledge of Spanish, both indigenous and European traders along the route would have been at a severe disadvantage. Gregg notes,“…one now sees everywhere the bustle, noise, and activity of a lively market town. As the Mexican very rarely speak English, the negotiations are mostly conducted in Spanish” (105).

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**Mexican Food**

Cultural exchange during the fur trade era could be seen in speech, dress, and even diet. Gregg mentions the “Cibolero,” or buffalo hunter his caravan encountered after arriving in New Mexico: “He was desirous to sell us some provisions, which, by the by, were welcome enough; for most of the company were out of bread and meat was becoming scarce, having seen but few buffalo since our first encounter with the Indians on the Cimarron. Our visitor…afterwards brought us an abundance of dry buffalo beef and some bags of coarse over-toasted loaves, a kind of hard bread much used by Mexican travelers. It is prepared by opening the ordinary leavened rolls and toasting them brown in an oven. Though exceedingly hard and insipid while dry, it becomes not only soft but palatable when soaked in water – or better still in hot coffee” (85).

A distinguishing factor for any location is what foods are regularly consumed there. Gregg finds that tortillas, atole, green pepper, and chocolate are plentiful and characterize the main diet for many of the New Mexican citizens. He writes, “The staple productions of the country are emphatically Indian corn and wheat. The former grain is most extensively employed for making *tortillas*-an article of food greatly in demand among the people, the use of which has been transmitted to them by the aborigines” (146). “How general soever the use of coffee among Americans may appear, that of *atole* is still more so among the lower classes of Mexicans. They virtually breakfast, dine, and sup upon it. Of this, indeed, with *frijoles* and *chile* (beans and red pepper), consists their principal food” (147). “*Chile verde* (green pepper), not as a mere condiment, but as a salad, served up in different ways, is reckoned by them one of the greatest luxuries. But however much we may be disposed to question their taste in this particular, no one can hesitate to do homage to their incomparable chocolate, in the preparation of which the Mexicans surely excel every other people” (147).

Aside from the food itself, Gregg also observes cultural differences in the manner of eating related to gender. He states, “What also strikes the stranger as a singularity in that country is that the females rarely ever eat with the males-at least in the presence of strangers-but usually take their food in the kitchen by themselves” (149).

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**Languages (Alternate Version – paragraph 1 with replacement synonyms)**

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