

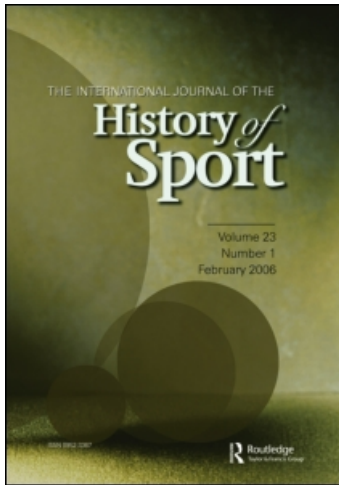
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Richard ‘Pancho’ González, Race and the Print Media in Postwar Tennis America

José M. Alamillo

Latinos and Latinas have a long history in the sport of tennis. This article examines the life of Richard ‘Pancho’ González, a Mexican-American tennis player who overcame racial and class barriers to reach the top of professional tennis in the 1950s. It focuses on the changing media coverage of González in English- and Spanish-language newspapers, mainstream magazines and sports journals. The article shows how the English print media constructed González as the ‘bad boy’ of tennis during the Second World War but then a decade later celebrated his athletic achievements as symbol of American democracy. The Spanish-language media repeatedly praised González as a role model for Mexican American youth. Ultimately, the racial ideologies communicated through media sources played an important role in the representation of Richard ‘Pancho’ González and the visible contributions of Latino athletes in US sports.

I’ve always fought, because I’ve always been pushed around. [1]

When people consider the image of ‘bad boy’ of tennis they typically recall John McEnroe and his infamous confrontations with officials and racquet-throwing temper tantrums. Today, however, few remember Richard ‘Pancho’ González. During the 1940s González was considered an earlier tennis ‘bad boy’ who hailed from the ‘other side of the tracks’ and stunned the tennis world with two national championships in 1948 and 1949. As a Mexican American growing up during Second World War Los Angeles, his ‘bad boy’ image in the English-language print media took on both racialized and gendered dimensions. González once wrote in his autobiography:

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I read the write ups. Every guy does, no matter how earnestly some might tell you that they don't. But ever since the time of my suspension for playing hooky, when some writers branded me as anything from a juvenile delinquent to Public Enemy No. 1, I stopped believing everything I read in the papers. [2]

In contrast, the Spanish-language media portrayed him as a national hero and role model for Mexican American youth. By the early 1950s González's image changed as he became a professional tennis player, a married man with three kids and a United States Davis Cup team member. During the height of the Cold War, the English print media portrayed González as a model 'American' family man and a weapon of Cold War democracy whose success could help defuse criticisms of racial inequality in the United States. González was very media-savvy, often criticizing media reporters for their negative portrayals and mischaracterizations. Even after his retirement he continued to fight for more accurate representation of himself and his people to gain respect from the sports media and broader US society.

This essay examines the print media's coverage of Richard 'Pancho' González from his amateur years in the 1940s to his professional career in the 1950s. After providing a brief biography of González, this article analyses his image in English- and Spanish-language newspapers, tennis magazines, sports journals, tennis publications and mainstream magazines. The essay will show that the English print media constructed González as the 'bad boy' of tennis within the wartime context of the zoot suit and 'pachuco' menace that provoked anti-Mexican American hostility in California and throughout the nation. Then, it examines the Spanish-language media's praise of González's athletic achievements and attempt to cast him as a positive role model for Mexican-American youth. Another topic of analysis is the coverage of the 'Operation Gonzalez' story, which reveals the interplay between sports, nationalism and politics. Finally, this essay shows how the print media during the Cold War constructed Richard González's athletic successes as a 'Horatio Alger' narrative, as evidence of a colour-blind and democratic America. Despite attempts to represent González as a symbol of Cold War integration, he still faced racial prejudice and discrimination. Ultimately, this essay argues that racial ideologies communicated through media sources played an important role in the representation of Richard 'Pancho' González and the visible contributions of Latino athletes in US sports.

González was born on 9 May 1928 and raised in a working-class neighbourhood of South Central Los Angeles near Exposition Park. Richard's parents were immigrants from Chihuahua, Mexico, who worked long days to help support their seven children. To keep the restless young boy off the streets and out of trouble, his mother bought him a 51-cent wooden racket at a local drugstore. At the age of 12 Richard taught himself to play tennis at Exposition Park's public tennis courts. 'Exposition Park was where I learned my tennis', González wrote:

It wasn't as swanky as the Los Angeles Tennis Club – not quite. It was a public playground with eight hard-surfaced courts, standing in the shadow of the Los Angeles Coliseum. Many Mexicans and Negroes learned the game there. Most of us

at Exposition Park had two things in common – very little money and a love of tennis.

In contrast to the multi-ethnic composition of Exposition Park, the Los Angeles Tennis Club (LATC) was the exclusive domain of the wealthy white tennis establishment, which consciously barred African-Americans and Mexican-Americans from club membership. After winning several public courts tournaments, González was invited to play at the LATC by tennis promoter Perry Jones, who allowed him to borrow a locker. Not surprisingly, González experienced a sense of isolation at the exclusive country club. He recalled: 'I found not a familiar face as I started for the locker room. No one smiled at me. No one even talked to me.' [3] He also felt isolated at Manual Arts High School and that contributed to his poor academic performance and high truancy record. Once González dropped out of school in 1945 he was banned from LATC tournaments. Soon thereafter González enlisted in the US Navy until he was dishonourably discharged in 1947 for lack of discipline. Upon returning to the tennis circuit, the 19-year-old Mexican American became a star amateur player but was soon suspended for breaking tournament rules. When he finally reconciled with Perry Jones, he was allowed to play against Herbie Flam for the Southern California Tennis Championship. After defeating Flam, González travelled to Forest Hills, New York, to play in the national championship. At 20 years old González stunned the tennis world by winning the 1948 national championship. The *New York Times* referred to him as: 'the rankest outsider of modern times [to sit] on the tennis throne'. [4] The following year he proved his 'American' patriotism by helping the United States capture the Davis Cup and a year later won the US national singles title again. After appearing in the cover of *American Lawn Tennis* with his new wife, Henrietta, who was hugging him sporting a big smile, he decided to turn professional and join the world tennis circuit.

González signed a contract for \$60,000 to play matches against Jack Kramer, considered the world's best tennis player. After losing 97 matches and winning only 27, González was shamelessly put down and did not return the following year. Between 1951 and 1953 González played tennis sporadically, trying new hobbies such as bowling, golf, poker games, hot-rod racing, breeding boxer dogs and spending time with his family. Three years later he was invited by Jack Kramer to re-join the pro tour. Now more self assured, González dominated the pro tour between 1954 and 1962. Despite his ascendancy in the tennis world, he had a series of contract squabbles with Kramer and often experienced racism on and off the court. For instance, he was denied a visa to play tennis in South Africa during the 1950s because Mexico opposed apartheid. Even though González was a US citizen, South Africa viewed him as a 'Mexican'. In addition, González's image was 'whitewashed' and depicted as a white blond tennis player on the front cover of a tennis programme. The English print media depicted González as uncooperative, hot-tempered and angry, and as picking fights with tennis officials and fans. He once told a reporter that 'I don't think I ever had a chip on my shoulder, but people said that about me.

I think when a fella feels pushed around it may appear he has a chip on his shoulder because he is defending himself.' [5]

His defensive shield affected his family life and relationship with women. In 1947 17-year-old Richard first met Henrietta Pedrin at his sister's party and within a year they eloped to Arizona and got married. The newlyweds moved into an apartment and lived off the prize-money González earned as an amateur player, which was not nearly enough; when Richard turned professional it meant being on the road and away from his wife and kids. González later admitted that his absence caused much strain in his family life. Subsequently he divorced and later married five times. In 1962 he coached the US Davis Cup team to a successful victory. He had many retirements that did not last, returning to play in several tournaments, and in 1968 was finally inducted to the International Tennis Hall of Fame. At the end of this contract with Jack Kramer he retired in 1961 and took a job as a tennis coach at a Bahamas tourist resort and later built an eight-acre tennis ranch in Malibu with his second wife, Madelyn Darrow (a former beauty queen, model and Hollywood actress). Not until the mid-1970s did González finally retire and worked as a professional tennis coach at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, where he met the Agassi family. On 31 March 1984, González married Rita Agassi, the 23-year-old sister of tennis champion Andre Agassi. He died in Las Vegas on 3 July 1995 of stomach cancer.

During the 1940s, newspaper and magazine sportswriters repeatedly emphasized González's ethnic and racial identity as opposed to Euro-American competitors who were considered normative 'white' tennis players. [6] They referred to him as a 'dark Mexican American youngster' [7] or 'husky 20-year old Mexican American' [8] or 'tall colourful Mexican American'. [9] They even linked his fighting spirit on the court to Mexican revolutionary heroes. For example, a *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist remarked that 'The way he murders that tennis ball, I think his real name is Pancho Villa, not Gonzales'. [10] Another *Los Angeles Times* article compared him to a gunslinger: 'National Champion Richard (Pancho) Gonzales unlimbers his big guns and opens fire today in the 31st annual Los Angeles Metropolitan tennis championships at Griffith Park.' [11] Even though he was born and raised in the United States, these descriptions functioned to mark González as a perpetual foreigner and cultural 'other'. [12]

González's 'bad boy' image was partially attributed to his early teenage years when he 'played hooky' from school and was sent to reform school for stealing. But it was his face scar and racial and ethnic identity that were given greater importance within the racially charged atmosphere of wartime Los Angeles. [13] The public image of González was influenced by sensationalist newspaper headlines about juvenile crime supposedly perpetuated by Mexican American youth subculture known as 'pachucos' and 'zoot suiters'. [14] A large scar on the left side of his face that was a result of a childhood car accident also contributed to his 'pachuco' image.

While playing for the 1947 Southern California Tennis Championship at the Los Angeles Tennis Club, González overheard a remark from a spectator in the front

row: 'Look at that scar on his face. It must be a knife wound.' [15] Angered by the remark, he later wrote that 'Thousands of tennis spectators believe it to be true, because they think a knife scar and Mexican American youth go hand in hand'. [16] One sportswriter attributed his 1949 national championship victory against Ted Schroeder to his scar. 'They said you could always tell when Pancho Gonzales was mad. The scar on his cheek – the mark left by an accident in his youth – caught fire. It sent an angry flame across his face'. [17] His face scar was often associated with the Latino athletic male stereotype, with a hot temper. [18]

One commentator called him a 'hot-headed Latin' whose 'blood boiled' and 'flame on his cheek burn hotter' when he heard discouraging remarks. [19] 'The scar affected my mother more than me', recalled González:

She had always prided herself on her appearance, as well as her family's appearance. All of her children had smooth, olive skin, and my scar was very visible. Worse, there was a Mexican song popular at that time called *Juan Charrasqueado* (John the Scarface) about a man who was the lowest of the low. Concerned that this scar might give me an unjust reputation, she rubbed cocoa butter cream on my face every day. I walked around smelling like chocolate. [20]

González's family was even more upset when the print media attached the 'pachuco' label to his aggressive behaviour on the court. Los Angeles newspapers popularized the term to refer to maladjusted Mexican male youths involved in gangs and juvenile delinquency. For this reason, according to a *Life Magazine* reporter, 'The entire González clan resents the legend that he grew up as a zoot-suiter *pachuco*'. Richard's mother insisted that her son 'was a good boy. The only crime he ever did was not go to school.' [21]

González's 'bad boy' image was often attributed to his penchant for Mexican food. One *Time* magazine reporter described his preference for beer and beans:

As the game's brightest young star, Pancho is now eligible for becks & nods from the social set that patronizes big time tennis. But, he says I don't drink cocktails – just beer. Besides, the food at fancy parties does not appeal to Pancho's cast-iron stomach, which thrives on beans (with or without chili and cheese) and *tortillas*. [22]

When González scored two major upsets at the 1947 Pacific Southwest Tennis Tournament, the *Los Angeles Times* credited his victory as 'Muy Caliente! and 'hotter than a piping bowl of chili'. [23] In addition, the *American Lawn Tennis* recounted how González was 'leaping around like a Mexican jumping bean [and] seems to be as hot as a bowl of chili on the center of court'. [24] The same tennis magazine attributed González's victory at the Southampton Tennis Championship to his Mexican food diet. 'You don't have to have chili sauce in your veins or jumping beans in the tennis balls to win at Southampton but it helps. Next time we inspect the Meadows Club Invitation tournament silverware, we're going to look closer for engraved *tamale*.' [25]

Another common perception was that González was a natural athlete whose on-court playing style resembled a 'jungle cat' and a *toro* (bull) in the middle of a bullfight. In a close quarter-final match against top seed Frank Parker at Forest Hills, González is described as having 'fought back like a tiger and pulled out of the set' to win the match and tournament. Parker often compared his matches against González to 'bullfights' because of his cannonball serves that landed like bullets and his 'incessant volleying attack'. [26] Because of his low-crouching playing style in anticipation of his opponents' serves and attacking the net, he was often compared to a 'tiger' who 'snarled at opponents, drilled balls at judges' heads, and . . . rushed into the stands to strong-arm a heckler'. [27] When González turned professional and joined the pro tennis world tour in the 1950s, he was asked by tour organizer Jack Kramer to 'ease up a little' against his opponents. But according to Kramer, 'That was like asking an angry jungle cat to claw gently'. Kramer added that 'Pancho gets 50 points on his serve and 50 points on terror'. [28] The use of animal metaphors to describe González resembled the racist perception of African-American athletes as naturally athletic compared to white athletes who are more technical and mentally tough. [29]

When analysing the press coverage of González in the Los Angeles-based Spanish language newspaper, *La Opinión*, the 'bad boy' image so prevalent in the English language media is largely absent. There were repeated accounts of a Mexican athlete from Los Angeles who became 'El Maestro de la Raqueta' (master of the tennis racquet) in a predominantly white sport. [30] *La Opinión* sportswriters celebrated his athletic achievements and anointed him as a 'role model' for Mexican American youth. The Spanish-language newspapers also followed his whereabouts at the Pan-American Tournament in Mexico City and public tennis tournaments organized by a local Mexican American tennis club.

When González was banned from playing tennis at the Los Angeles Tennis Club, he headed for the public tennis courts at Exposition Park, Griffith Park and Evergreen Playground. González participated in several tennis tournaments at Evergreen Playground. The Mexican American Tennis Club was formed at Evergreen Playground in the late 1930s and with the financial sponsorship of the Mexican Athletic Union (UAM) organized several tournaments against tennis players from Mexico. [31] One of González's main rivals and close friend was Fernando Isais, an eight-time national horseshoe-pitching champion and founding secretary of the Mexican Tennis Club. Isais boasted about never losing a tennis match against his close friend. 'Ricardo González has yet to beat Fernando Isais,' asserted *La Opinión*. 'The UAM has much to be proud of when its champion Isais competes against González who was named as the future champion of the world by the white tennis establishment.' [32]

La Opinión's sports columnists routinely referred to tennis at the Los Angeles Tennis Club as 'el deporte blanco' (the white sport) for its association with exclusive country clubs, the predominance of white players and its discriminatory practice of barring African-Americans. Visiting tennis players from Mexico complained to

La Opinión about 'discourtesies' they received at a LATC tournament in which they were denied tennis balls for practice and were ejected from the stage box as they watched tournaments. [33] Even though Richard González was allowed to play at the LATC, he did not always feel welcome. *La Opinión* sports columnists were surprised that González, a 'dark-skinned young man', nicknamed 'el muchacho travieso' (troublemaker boy) was allowed into the 'white tennis world, despite the long history of racism in the sport'. [34] Inclusion however did not always lead to equal treatment. Nevertheless, *La Opinión* celebrated González's accomplishments in the realm of tennis. 'The triumph of González was one of the biggest and amazing successes in the annals of white tennis,' declared *La Opinión* sports columnist Rodolfo Garcia, reminding readers that 'González is Mexican – because he is a son of Mexican parents. He is Mexican because it does not matter where he is born – achieved an amazing career in just 20 years of age in the history of white tennis.' [35] After winning the 1948 national title, González received the best athlete award from the Helms Athletic Foundation. *La Opinión* sports columnists reflected on the meaning of this prestigious award for Mexican American youth:

This award represents something important for all Mexicans that were born in this country and those that reside here, who struggle daily against [racial] prejudices, he shows that perhaps these prejudices may disappear in the near future. ... The Mexican population that resides in southern California should be ready to deliver a tribute to Gonzalez for what he has achieved, triumph that he has reached by his own effort, spirit of initiative, and stoicism that allowed to confront those barriers that always interfere against those that are not born with a silver spoon in their mouth. The case of Gonzales is an example for our Mexican youth, who at 20 years old has already obtained financial security with a perseverance and talent, and reached a place where he can determine his own successful future. He is the example for youngsters of Mexican origin. [36]

La Opinión boasted about González's athletic achievements to instruct Mexican-American youth to follow a similar path. Sport columnists promoted a middle-class ideology of 'racial uplift' by instructing the youth that through moral refinement and hard work they could advance socially and economically. [37]

After González won his second national title, *La Opinión's* Rodolfo Garcia, again reminded readers that González was in fact the champion of the world since a football team or boxer that wins a United States championship typically declare themselves champion of the world. He added that it should be 'equally, in tennis. The one who wins the national championship is really the champion of the world, since United States produces the best tennis players in the world.' [38] Years later, when González was losing matches against Jack Kramer, *La Opinión* sports writers encouraged readers to attend his matches in Los Angeles because 'by having Mexican fans maybe his luck will change'. [39] Even González believed things would be different upon returning to his hometown. At the Pan Pacific Auditorium in front of 6,000 fans, including many Latino and Latina spectators, González beat Kramer. [40]

A year earlier, González had played in ten expense-paid tournaments throughout the year, violating the amateur rule of eight tournaments per year; thus he faced suspension by the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA). While González waited for a decision from USLTA, the English and Spanish print media reported that Mexico government officials offered González to trade his US citizenship for Mexican citizenship and play in international competitions. In addition, the Bank of Mexico offered to pay for his college education and a job at Mexico's consulate office in Los Angeles. [41]

This story became known as 'Operation Gonzalez' in the English-language press and revealed how sports and politics play an important role in power struggles between nations. The story began in October 1947 when González played in his first Pan American Tennis Tournament in Mexico City. Eduardo Aguilar, president of the Bank of Mexico, founded the Pan American Tennis Tournament in 1942 to develop tennis in Mexico, bring tourism to Mexico City and promote 'goodwill relations' with its northern neighbour. [42] This tournament was part of the 'Good Neighbour Policy' that sought to promote inter-American friendship and cooperation between the United States and Latin America. [43] During the 1947 tournament González 'caught the fancy of local tennis patrons', especially Eduardo Aguilar, 'the man behind the tennis movement south of the border, [who] opened overtures' and invited him to play for Mexico. [44] González accepted and this decision attracted local sportswriters who penned glowing accounts about his performances. [45] When González defeated Mexico's national champion, Armando Vega, *El Excelsior's* sports columnist lamented that at least 'we were left with the consolation that he was a player of Mexican blood'. [46] The *American Lawn Tennis* magazine billed the match as a 'real Mexican blood match'. [47] Even though González did not win the championship, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that since then González 'has been pondering over the problem ... of whether or not to don the cloak of Mexican citizenship'. [48]

Once the story broke, Los Angeles newspapers updated readers on González's final decision and blamed the 'tennis tycoons', mainly Perry Jones and USLTA, for their 'attempted sale of the nation's most promising young player to Mexico'. [49] Ned Cronin of the *Los Angeles Daily News* recounted how after González beat local talent at 1947 Pacific Southwest Championship 'Jones & Co. had launched a campaign to sell Gonzales to the Mexicans'. He claimed that

Word got around that it would be a wonderful thing for Gonzales to go to Mexico where he could be among his own people and get the breaks he so richly deserves. As an American citizen he must have felt out of place way up here in the United States – a former GI lost and bewildered with nobody to turn to except his own countrymen. [50]

Cronin berated the 'tennis moguls' for their 'stony silence' on Mexico's offer to González: 'One might wonder why Jones and the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) didn't kick up a horrific fuss over Mexico trying to put the

hustle on our tennis talent.' He then compared this situation to the 'baseball war' between the United States and Mexico, when Jorge Pasquel, head of the Mexican Baseball League, lured 'the big leaguers south of the border' until the 'baseball fathers' fought back. [51] Cronin argued that this is 'The same music with different words might have been expected from the tennis set. . . . But the brass in the net ranks kept its collective lip well buttoned.' [52] Paul Zimmerman, *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist, was less critical and blamed González's lack of education for violating USLTA rules:

Tennis had been his life. He had not cared at all for grammar school but instead spent long hours on the public courts perfecting his net game. When the Mexican offer came it appeared that his hopes of stardom had been brooked by rules he never had bothered to understand. [53]

Being acutely aware of his public image in the press, González manipulated the story to his own advantage in order to avoid suspension and gain a spot on the US Davis Cup team. He told the *Los Angeles Times*: 'It's a hard decision and I haven't been able to make up my mind yet. . . . I must give my answer, but there are so many things to consider that right now I don't know which way to turn.' [54] Ultimately, González decided to keep his US citizenship, citing his military service in the US Navy and desire to represent the United States in the international arena. When asked why he rejected Mexico's offer González responded: 'I prize my citizenship above all these benefits [offered by Mexico]. After discussing the problem with my parents I made up my mind to stay right here.' [55] The *Los Angeles Times* praised his decision: 'Pancho Gonzales, the new sensation on the Southern California tennis horizon, has been described as an irresponsible young man. We prefer to think that he proved the contrary when he decided against giving up his citizenship just to become a tennis bum in Mexico.' [56] The newspaper concluded that 'his faith in the American way will continue to pay dividends'. [57] *Newsweek* magazine reported on González's desire to join the US Davis Cup team. 'A friend helped make up his mind for him by asking if he would you rather play for the American Davis Cup team or the Mexican. Pancho's was American.' [58] Ultimately, the USLTA rewarded González for keeping his US citizenship by giving him a shorter suspension of six months, thus allowing him to participate in the larger tournaments.

Only *La Opinion* newspaper raised doubts about the Mexican government's job offer to González. 'The job offer was not very credible. . . . Most likely this was a forged story created to give publicity to the boy.' This story did generate widespread publicity, allowing González to leverage Mexico's offer against the US tennis officials. The newspaper did confirm, however, that González was given a proposal to play under the Mexican flag, but the offer was given by the Mexican Tennis Association, not the Mexican government. This was an important distinction, since the sports association could hire employees for the Mexico consulate office. *La Opinion* also observed that 'the [Mexican] government is not very interested in sports, especially in

tennis. The idea that he will be become Mexican again does not ring credible south of the Rio Bravo.' [59] Although tennis was overshadowed by baseball and soccer, the Mexican government did attempt to develop the sport by sponsoring a Davis Cup team (since 1924) and forming the Mexico Tennis Association, charged with developing junior tennis players at the city's premier tennis club, the Centro Deportivo Chapultepec. [60]

After González won his first national title, a *Los Angeles Times* reader penned a letter titled 'No Hyphen Needed' and criticized the LA newspaper for references to the 'the tall, colourful Mexican-American'. [61] The reader argued that González's ethnicity 'can add nothing to his prestige as a great tennis champion and American champion' and since Euro-American tennis players are not hyphenated 'Why then make reference to him as a Mexican-American any more than to some of our other fine tennis players?' The reader concluded that 'He is an American and will, undoubtedly, play as an American in foreign competition in the future'. The reader expressed the prevailing view during the early days of the Cold War that the United States was a democratic society with equal opportunities for racial-minority athletes in sports. Jackie Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 not only signalled the successful integration of professional baseball and other sports but also symbolized Cold War integration. As Damion Thomas has suggested, 'Robinson's success helped characterize integrated sports as proof that a world with the United States as the leader of the free world held forth a realistic change that all people of the world would experience progress and be able to live "the good life".' [62] In fact, African American athletes, including Althea Gibson, the first black female to compete in professional tennis tournaments, were recruited by the US State Department to participate in goodwill tours around the world as part of the government's effort to sell 'American Democracy' abroad. [63] Although González did not take part in athletic goodwill tours, his athletic achievements in a predominantly white sport were used by the sports and mainstream media to dispel the notion that the US was undemocratic for racial minorities. [64]

After winning two national championships and helping the US win the Davis Cup in 1949, González's image shifted from the 'bad boy' of tennis to an 'all-American' athlete who demonstrated the material benefits of American democracy. For example, when González won his second national title in 1949, his victory took on a new meaning as Cold War hysteria reached new levels in the United States. After mainland China established a Communist regime, there was concern that Soviet Russia was installing Communist regimes around the world. But as Mary L. Dudziak has convincingly argued, the image of American democracy was also at stake when Communist countries criticized the USA's poor record on race relations. [65] So when prominent African-American activist Paul Robeson made a speech before the World Peace Congress criticizing American racism and claiming that African-Americans would not fight on behalf of the United States, his remarks were not well received by the American press. [66] A *Los Angeles Times* sports

columnist used the González's athletic success to counter Robeson's remarks. He wrote that

While Paul Robeson was raising accusations that discrimination is destroying the hope of American youth, the complete reply was being played out on the tennis courts of Forest Hills, just 40 miles away. Gonzales is 21, the son of a Mexican-American family similar to so many in this community. He had no advantages above those granted any other youngster in this region, but he made the most of what was available. Gonzales scored a great victory, and in so doing marked a victory as well for the American way of life. [67]

Robeson was also criticized by Jackie Robinson, who made national headlines when he testified against Communists at House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. [68]

In an attempt to manipulate foreign perceptions of American race relations, the sports media applied the Horatio Alger myth to the life story of Richard González. The *American Lawn Tennis* magazine used the Horatio Alger narrative storyline to explain González's individual achievement in the sport of tennis and as evidence of the superiority of America's capitalist system. 'When national champion Richard Gonzales battered defending champion into submission in the Los Angeles Metropolitan tennis championship', wrote Bion Abbott, 'he wrote the final chapter in a success story which reads like a volume straight from Horatio Alger'. [69] When sports writers discussed his family's upbringing they emphasized his Mexican working-class roots, followed by his transformation into a tennis champion with prize money and an exclusive endorsement contract with a sporting-goods company. As Paul Zimmerman of the *Los Angeles Times* put it, 'Pancho definitely is an across the tracks athlete. Yet, like most of them, he has poise, modesty, charm, gracious court mannerisms, and sparkling colour.' [70] Several years later the same newspaper emphasized his high earnings. 'Big Pancho González may have spurned a formal education during his tempestuous youth but he picked up a rudimentary knowledge of mathematics along the way. ... Pancho's favourite indoor sport is adding up the dollars that roll in from his professional tennis endeavours.' [71]

For González, earnings from the tour and endorsements were important, but he also wanted help win the Davis Cup for the United States. In 1949, González was selected to the Davis Cup team by the USLTA and helped to win the international tennis trophy against Australia. Although he did not rejoin the Davis Cup team when he became a contracted professional player in the 1950s, he continued to support the team by training with the members. As one Davis Cup coach asserted, 'The US Lawn Tennis Association has not instructed us to hire Gonzales, but [he] will help us, out of patriotism. If [he] can work out with us they will not only test our games to the utmost but will give a terrific boost to our morale.' [72] In 1962 González became a coach for the US Davis Cup team and quickly earned a reputation for 'drilling' his players and 'losing his temper' with players who did not try hard to win for their country. [73] 'Most people regard Wimbledon as the most important tourney on the

world circuit but not Pancho,' wrote one sports columnist. 'He rates Davis Cup play as No. 1 because you're representing your country.' He was later quoted as stating that 'I think an American would rather win his own title than Wimbledon. . . . I don't think I'd ever trade my national championship over Ted Schroeder for anything I ever won.' [74]

Another prevailing image of González was the 'male breadwinner' and 'father' who spent quality time with his wife Henrietta and three children when not playing tennis. As Elaine Tyler May has argued, the traditional family was portrayed as the defence of democratic capitalism and against external threats such as nuclear bombs and Communist subversion. [75] A *Los Angeles Times* article entitled 'Pancho Rests by Helping at Home' described his 'vacation from the tennis wars' by spending time with wife and three sons at home. The picture shows González tinkering with hot-rod cars under the watchful eyes of his three sons and wife. González was quoted as saying that 'This is my first summer at home with my family in six years . . . now all I have to do is help my wife Henrietta, feed the kids, fix up the house, clean out the garage, trim the shrubbery, get the kids from school, bring in groceries'. The rest of the article described his new hobby of racing his hot rod on Saturdays. Henrietta complained: 'When he warmed up the car outside our garage last week, neighbours came flying out of their homes like an atom bob had gone off.' [76]

The home life of the González family was not, however, as romantic as depicted by the print media. When he returned home from the pro tour he had a difficult time readjusting to home life and he admitted that it was hardest on Henrietta and his three young sons. 'When I was on the tennis tour, I didn't spend as much time with them as I should have. So, while I wasn't rough on them like my father was with us, I wasn't as good a father as I should have been.' [77] After separating for three years and reconciling, the couple finally divorced in December 1958. Henrietta testified in court that 'Last June, my husband called me from New York and told me he had not been happy at home and would not return to me when his tour ended'. [78] In the final settlement, Henrietta received the family home, a monthly alimony for the children and insurance policy, while Richard retained his bank accounts, tennis and advertising contracts and property investments. One jurist was quoted as saying that 'This is the most important match he has ever lost'. This was only the first of his six divorces and González had eight children with four different wives. Richard later admitted that 'I just can't hold still long enough to be a model husband. I can't relax. I've got too much energy. I can't come home at night, put on my house slippers and lead a domestic, by-the-fireside existence.' [79]

Despite the image of González as a symbol of Cold War democracy and integration, his inclusion in the tennis world did not mean he was free of racial discrimination. During the pro tour in Texas, González described a racist incident in which he and Pancho Segura were denied service in a restaurant that posted a 'No Mexicans Served Here' sign. Even though they protested that Segura was not Mexican but Ecuadorian and González was a world tennis champion, the owner said it did not matter; they were refused service because 'Those Mexs are all alike'. Upon returning

to Los Angeles he discussed the racial incident with his lawyer, who told him that he had escaped much overt forms of racial discrimination because of his celebrity status but it had caught up with him. His lawyer advised him to pay more attention to his social responsibility to 'Your people – the Mexican-Americans. Their roots grow in shallow soil here. They need help. Especially the kids. They need understanding.' [80] Richard heeded the advice and began to meet with Mexican-American leaders such as Ignacio Lopez, publisher of *El Espectador*, and Ed Roybal, the first Mexican-American city council member of Los Angeles, to gain a better understanding of the problems confronting Mexican-American youngsters. [81]

After studying the 'gang' problem and 'why all the cops were his enemies', González concluded that

They cry for recognition, a life without restrictions, equal rights, to find employment with chances for advancement. When they can't find a place in the American way of life, they are forced to resort to their own groups, their own behaviour patterns which are neither American nor Mexican. And they become a clique widely separated from the majority of their countrymen.

González sympathized with Mexican American youth because they had 'two strikes against them the day they enter the world', which led to become 'a bewildered, lost lot' and thus needed leadership to gain some recognition. González understand that he also was seeking recognition by the white tennis establishment and although he was somewhat removed from the Mexican American community in Los Angeles he 'resolved to do something to help in his own way'. [82]

In another example, González's image in a tennis programme guide was 'whitened' during the 1959 Jack Kramer Pro World Tour. The front cover of the programme guide featured the body of Richard González with a different face with Anglo-like features such as blond hair, lighter skin, small thin nose, and smaller lips. There is no mention of the player's identity in the front cover in the programme guide, but when you analyse the body's pose inside the guide it closely resembles González. 'The way he was treated during his prime is summed up in a Kramer tour program featuring Pancho Gonzalez on the cover,' noted his younger brother Ralph Gonzales. 'This Pancho however, was altered to make him more acceptable to country club crowds. This Pancho, through the miracle of printing, was given a blond head of hair and light skin.' [83] González later admitted that his feud with Kramer was about money. 'I didn't always see eye-to-eye with Jack when we were playing for money, it changes the nature of the game, and I suppose I did become temperamental. But we played in some awful conditions, and I think [Kramer] sometimes paid more attention to money than conditions.' [84] One newspaper article reported that 'The rivalry between the two was a natural social and ethnic one; and since both men were loud and outspoken, the rivalry was set ablaze later by their angry quarrelling.' [85] According to his first wife Henrietta, Richard resented Tony Trabert's frequent slights in correcting his English. [86] The only person he would prefer to spend time with was Pancho Segura, originally from Ecuador, who was recruited by the University of

Miami to play college tennis and then joined the pro tour in 1954. According to the Australian player Lew Hoad, both 'Panchos' were 'close pals' because they were 'born on the wrong side of the tracks' and 'Their rich friendship has bloomed in their own vernacular Spanish'. [87]

It was not only tennis players that González had a difficult time befriending. The umpires and fans were a thorn on his side as well. For example during an Australian match against Ken Rosewall fans 'erupted in a storm of hisses, boos and foot pounding' against González and continued to taunt 'the Los Angeles star by shouting excerpts from a newspaper dispatch in which Gonzales said Rosewall didn't have a chance against him'. [88] At another Australian match against Lew Hoad the majority of fans booed Gonzáles. In response 'Gonzales slammed the ball angrily into the stands'. [89] One spectator kept yelling at González until he stopped the game and yelled at the spectator to 'Come onto the court and we'll have it out'. [90] Some hecklers called him a 'poor sport' and 'cry baby' when González threw his racket on the court when he missed the ball. In response González walked to the first row of the stands and asked the hecklers to come forward. One heckler heeded his command and two exchanged words before officials intervened. [91] González suffered disqualification at Wimbledon in a semi-final match when he walked out of the game after a lady referee refused his demand to change the linesman because she ruled against him three times during close line calls. The lady referee stood up to Richard until he walked away towards the locker room as he shouted: 'I don't need preaching from any referee – any lady referee.' [92] González defended his antagonistic behaviour towards fans and umpires. He wrote that

A tennis player is entitled to temperament. Nobody criticizes an actor or actress for temperamental outbursts. Is tennis so unrelated to the stage? On a court in an important match a player performs before thousands. ... He's crowd conscious; perhaps not of individual faces, but of the throng which includes the swelling tide of voices, the thunder of applause, the groans of sorrow. He becomes part athlete with a generous slice of ham thrown in. [93]

González constantly felt under scrutiny from the sports media and public eye in part because of his racial and ethnic identity. He closely identified with Althea Gibson, considered the 'Jackie Robinson of tennis', who faced racial barriers in the white tennis world and sometimes had difficulty controlling her emotions. Thus he pointed out that 'Any person playing under similar conditions, unless he can completely mask every emotion, is apt to be caught with his humour down.' [94]

González once wrote in his autobiography that 'I've got the feeling that the interest in Pancho Gonzales was not based on what I could do with my racket, but rather, on what I had achieved off the court – as a non-conformist. I was a curiosity number.' [95] This statement reveals how deeply aware González was of his image in

mainstream press, especially outside the tennis courts. This defensive posture began early in life as a rebellious teenager who defied his parents, truant officers, tennis elite, umpire, fans and the press. During his amateur years in the 1940s he was depicted as the 'bad boy' of tennis who threatened the tennis establishment to revoke his US citizenship and play tennis for Mexico. However after he won two national titles and helped the US win the Davis Cup his image began to change. During the early days of the Cold War González was hailed as a symbol of American democracy and a 'Horatio Alger' figure as well as a family man. His all-American boy image was touted as a model of racial progress and American nationalism at the height of the Cold War. In contrast, the Spanish language press did not portray González in a negative way but rather cultivated a positive image of his athletic achievements and upheld him as a model for Mexican-American youth to emulate. However by the 1950s, when he joined the professional ranks and toured around the world for money, he still faced racial discrimination inside and outside the tennis world. For example Richard's image was 'whitewashed' and depicted as a white blond tennis player in the front cover of a 1959 tennis programme to supposedly appease white audiences. This experience made him sensitive to the struggles of African-American and Latino players within the sport. When Arthur Ashe was a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, González took special interest in him and offered advice and coaching tips. Ashe wrote in his autobiography that 'Three stars shone brighter than all the others in my sky. One of them was Pancho González, who was not only the best player in the world but also an outsider, like me, because he was Mexican American'. [96]

Notes

- [1] Richard 'Pancho' González quoted in Marshall Smith, 'This Old Toro is Just Too Mean to Quit' *Life Magazine*, 12 Sept. 1969, 77.
- [2] Gonzales and Rice, *Man with a Racket*, 53.
- [3] *Ibid.*, 24–5.
- [4] *New York Times*, 19 Dec. 1948.
- [5] *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Feb. 1975.
- [6] *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Sept. 1948.
- [7] *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Sept. 1948.
- [8] *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Sept. 1948.
- [9] *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Sept. 1948.
- [10] Gonzales and Rice, *Man with a Racket*, 129.
- [11] *Los Angeles Times*, 16 Jan. 1949.
- [12] On Mexican American stereotypes in the print media see Reyes, 'Behind the Mask of Zorro'.
- [13] For a description of the racial climate in Los Angeles during the Second World War, see Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles*.
- [14] Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 1–6.
- [15] Gonzales and Rice, *Man with a Racket*, 26.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 61.
- [17] Grimsley, 'Pancho Greatest Hour at Forest Hills', 299.

- [18] Frio and Onigman, 'Good Field, No Hit'.
- [19] Girmsley, 'Pancho Gonzales – Latin Fire and Fury', 96.
- [20] Rita Agassi Gonzalez, 'The Power and the Fury', *World Tennis*, Sept. 1987, 75.
- [21] Gene Farmer, 'Pancho Gonzales: Amateur Tennis's No. 1 Bad Boy is also its No. 1 Star', *Life Magazine*, 6 June 1949, 77.
- [22] 'Indoors & Out', *Time Magazine*, 4 April 1949, 77.
- [23] *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Sept. 1947.
- [24] Bion Abbott, 'Pancho Gonzales Stars as Real Giant Killer', *American Lawn Tennis*, 1 Nov. 1947, 34.
- [25] Jeane Hoffman, 'Conquistador Gonzales Reigns at Southampton', *American Lawn Tennis*, 15 Sept. 1948, 87.
- [26] 'Life a Bullfight'. *Time Magazine*, 27 Sept. 1948, 64.
- [27] 'Pancho at 41', *Time Magazine*, 16 Feb. 1970, 57.
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Djata, *Blacks at the Net*, 183–91. See also Harris and Kyle-DeBose, *Charging the Net*.
- [30] *La Opinión*, 19 Sept. 1949.
- [31] *La Opinión*, 5 Nov. 1939; *La Opinión*, 25 Aug. 1946.
- [32] *La Opinión*, 11 May 1947.
- [33] *La Opinión*, 5 Dec. 1941.
- [34] *La Opinión*, 27 Sept. 1947; *La Opinión*, 19 Sept. 1948.
- [35] *La Opinión*, 20 Sept. 1948; *La Opinión*, 21 Sept. 1948.
- [36] *La Opinión*, 17 Nov. 1948.
- [37] On racial uplift ideology see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 1–5.
- [38] *La Opinión*, 7 Sept. 1949.
- [39] *La Opinión*, 8 Jan. 1950.
- [40] *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Jan. 1950.
- [41] 'Lazy, but Wonderful', *Newsweek*, 2 Aug. 1948, 70.
- [42] Tennis Mexicano, *México en la Copa Davis*, 1–3.
- [43] Spellacy, 'Mapping the Metaphor of the Good Neighbour'.
- [44] *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Feb. 1948.
- [45] According to *El Excelsior*, 'Ricardo Gonzalez, the Mexican tennis player from Los Angeles that was made famous winning against Frank Parker in the last Pacific Southwest tournament will play with the colours of Mexico in the Pan American Tennis Tournament': *El Excelsior*, 9 Oct. 1947.
- [46] *El Excelsior*, 17 Oct. 1947.
- [47] Mary Hardwick, 'Drobny Grits Teeth, Wins Pan-American', *American Lawn Tennis*, 6 Oct. 1947, 6.
- [48] *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Feb. 1948. During this period Mexico's citizenship law allowed those born outside Mexico, but whose parents were born in Mexico, the opportunity to reclaim their Mexican citizenship before their 21st birthday.
- [49] *Los Angeles Daily News*, 24 Feb. 1948.
- [50] Ibid.
- [51] Vaughn, 'Jorge Pasquel and the Evolution of the Mexican League'. See also Regalado, *Viva Baseball!*, 39–41.
- [52] Ibid.
- [53] *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Sept. 1948.
- [54] *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Feb. 1949.
- [55] Ibid.
- [56] *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Sept. 1948.
- [57] *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Sept. 1948.

- [58] Although González was not chosen for the 1948 team, he did join the team in 1949 and helped the United States capture the Davis Cup by winning both matches against Australia: 'Lazy, But Wonderful', *Newsweek*, 2 Aug. 1948.
- [59] *La Opinión*, 12 June 1949.
- [60] Potter, 'Mexico's Smouldering Fires', 14. See also Brewster, 'Patriotic Pastimes'.
- [61] *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Oct. 1948.
- [62] Thomas, 'Playing the "Race Card"', 215.
- [63] Schwenk, 'Negro Stars and the USIA's Portrait of Democracy'.
- [64] On the role of sports media spreading Cold War propaganda see Massaro, 'Press Box Propaganda?'
- [65] Dudziak *Cold War Civil Rights*, 18–25.
- [66] Cygan, 'A Man of His Times'.
- [67] *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Sept. 1949.
- [68] Smith, 'The Paul Robeson – Jackie Robinson Saga'.
- [69] Bion Abbott, 'Pancho Shows Home Folks How He Did It', *American Lawn Tennis*, 10 April 1949, 12.
- [70] *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Sept. 1948.
- [71] *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Jan. 1953.
- [72] *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Nov. 1954.
- [73] *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1962; *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Dec. 1963.
- [75] *Los Angeles Times*, 18 March 1965.
- [75] May, *Homeward Bound*, 1–5.
- [76] *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 1957.
- [77] *The Tribune*, 12 Dec. 1987.
- [78] *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Dec. 1948.
- [79] *Ibid.*
- [80] Gonzales and Rice, *Man With a Racket*, 213.
- [81] For a discussion of Ignacio Lopez and the Spanish-language newspaper *El Espectador*, see García, *Mexican Americans*, 84–112.
- [82] Gonzales and Rice, *Man With a Racket*, 134–9.
- [83] Teetor and Gonzales, '¡Viva Pancho!', 27.
- [84] *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Dec. 1987.
- [85] *Chicago Sun-Times*, 5 July 1985.
- [86] *Ibid.*, 73.
- [87] Hoad and Pollard, *The Lew Hoad Story*, 134.
- [88] *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Feb. 1957.
- [89] *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Jan. 1958.
- [90] *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Feb. 1959.
- [91] *Los Angeles Times*, 27 April 1969.
- [92] *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1972.
- [93] Gonzales and Rice, *Man With a Racket*, 152–3.
- [94] Festle, 'Jackie Robinson without the Charm'.
- [95] Gonzales and Rice, *Man with a Racket*, 23.
- [96] Ashe and Ramersad, *Days of Grace*, 5.

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