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**Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo**. *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930.* Al Filo: Mexican American Studies Series. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012. 256 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57441-464-6.

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**Along the Rails: Mexican American Rail Work and Community Formation**

Building and maintaining railroad tracks in the nineteenth century was so perilous that missing fingers were at times viewed as a qualification: foremen knew injured men were experienced enough to be careful with their remaining digits. This is one of many revelations in Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo's *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930*, which examines the lives and labors of Mexican railway workers (known as *traqueros*). Poorly paid, *traqueros* engaged in "construction, repair, or work related to maintenance-of-way.... Among other things, they dug ditches, shoveled rocks, graded road bed[s], lifted and laid ties and rails, and drove spikes" (p. 59).

Garcilazo frames his book as a contribution to social and labor history by "seek[ing] to examine the intersections of race/culture, class and gender among the Mexican railroad worker communities in the United States" (p. 6). *Traqueros* opens with a contextual chapter on the social and economic development of the Southwest. In chapter 2, Garcilazo discusses labor recruitment and explores the complex ethnic and racial divisions within the Mexican community. The next two chapters focus on daily work as well as direct labor contestation and indirect, subaltern forms of resistance. The book's closing two chapters explore *traquero* communities and the emergence of "*traquero* culture," which Garcilazo argues contributed to broader Mexican culture in the United States.

Mainstream historical scholarship has turned away from densely textured accounts of workers' daily lives and communities in order to engage abstract theoretical questions about capitalism or industrial labor. As a result, Garcilazo's more traditional labor history approach is refreshing. Chapter 5, "Boxcar Communities," for example, is a powerful analysis of early *traquero* communities, often centered on repurposed train cars used for housing. These communities represented some of the earliest examples of Mexican community formation in the United States. Railroad employers promoted this development "in order to reinforce and recreate traditional family values," which would in theory encourage hard work and discourage labor unrest (p. 116). Meanwhile, workers appreciated the chance to bring their families to the United States, resulting in an overlap of labor and management interest. This practice "gave rise to a common set of experiences in the United States and therefore helped reinforce Mexican cultural traditions" (p. 136).

Similarly, Garcilazo deftly uses *corridos*, traditional Mexican worker songs, to reconstruct *traquero* values and lifestyle. Examination of a *corrido* like "*Los Enganchados* / The Hooked Ones" provides insight into labor migration ("we arrived at Laguna / Without any hope") and rail work ("with sledge hammers and shovels / Throwing earth up the track") (pp. 152-155). The *corridos* add immediacy, force, and emotion to Garcilazo's analysis.

From the book's strengths flow its limitations. Garcilazo repeatedly stresses that *Traqueros* fills a historiographical gap, yet he never moves beyond gesturing at this story's wider implications. There is little exploration of how his account modifies or affirms our assumptions about labor, railroads, or capitalism. This is a real shame, because Garcilazo advances many important ideas. For brevity, I will focus on Garcilazo's argument about the importance of gender and patriarchy to capitalist labor processes as one example of his many fascinating, if under-explained, points.

Garcilazo repeatedly points to the role of women and families in *traquero* communities. At times, women helped stabilize *traquero* communities and kept the peace, while at other points they sustained workers during walk-outs and even participated in strikes directly

(see the fascinating discussion of a 1903 strike on pages 83-84). Garcilazo synthesizes these points into the fascinating observation that "beyond the biological reproduction of a 'common labor' force, mexicanas represented an informal and unpaid labor force and an essential part of the new scientifically managed railroad hierarchy" (p. 118). Yet this passing point is ignored in the conclusion of both the chapter and the book as a whole. With a few more pages of analysis and an explicit discussion, this fascinating observation could have served as a powerful historiographical critique of works that have failed to treat family and domestic work as internal to the labor process.

Garcilazo observes that *traqueros* "enjoyed little if any of the romantic qualities of other higher level [railroad] occupations" (p. 59). Yet without more clarification beyond showing us what we have missed, Garcilazo's project risks merely bringing *traqueros* into the tent of romanticized rail work. There is so much more going on in the background of Garcilazo's account. The reader is left wanting more.

It is unfortunate that Garcilazo could not engage recent historiographical developments that may have enabled him to address some of these broader questions. Though *Traqueros* came out in 2012, it is actually the culmination of a dissertation completed in 1993. The author had been revising the dissertation when he unexpectedly fell into a coma in 1998 and died of related causes a few years later, in 2001. In a move inspiring to anyone nearing completion of a lengthy research project, colleagues brought the book to publication. In a heartfelt foreword, Vicki L. Ruiz explains that she "strived to balance the strength of scholarship with the measure of man" (p. 4). As a reader, one wishes Garcilazo could have participated in the emerging field of the history of American capitalism, which has taken dense, nuanced analysis of labor and culture such as Garcilazo's and used it to reframe thinking about big issues of political economy.

Garcilazo has made a powerful contribution to the historiography of the railroads as well as the history of Mexican workers in the United States. Though the book was too tentative in engaging broad historical questions, it is refreshing at a time when analyses of the rise of big business and railroads operate at a level of abstraction that has left the picks and shovels of common laborers barely discernible. *Traqueros* are an invisible labor force no longer.

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