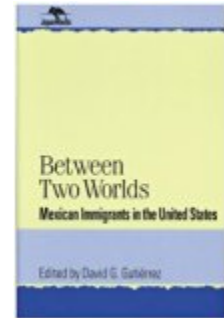


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David G. Gutierrez, ed. *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1996. xxvii + 271 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2473-0.

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Between Two Worlds

By 1990, the Mexican and pan-Latino population of the United States had reached 22 million and is projected to grow to 40 million by the year 2010 (p. xvii). This statistic, startling to some, alarming to many, is what this book is about—that is, the steady and growing increase in Mexican immigration to the United States and the problems it is causing for both the immigrants and the policy makers in this country.

David Gutierrez has collected a number of essays that bring together a representative summary of the scholarship on this timely topic. He is particularly effective in choosing essayists who review the history of Mexican immigration and also the debate about it within the Mexican community. For this, he must be applauded. On the other hand, however, when he brings together essays that attempt to summarize a new departure in the interpretation of this information, it does not come through as clearly as those that deal with the historical and cultural scholarship on the subject.

The first section of the book is a historical review of Mexican immigration to the United States. Beginning with the Sonoran influx into California during the Gold Rush, the selected authors trace the movement of Mexicans into the United States during the first three decades of this century. By 1929, 1.5 million Mexicans had immigrated to the United States. This is followed by a comprehensive review of the Bracero program of the 1940s and 1950s. While no new information is added, the summary of Mexican immigration history provided here is excellent and is so well done that it could easily be useful as

a classroom text for the increasing number of courses on Latinos in the United States. The only limitation is that it does not include Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Caribbean immigration as well, but then that is not the subject of the book.

The second section of the study includes a series of essays which delve into the attitudes toward Mexican immigration on the part of the Mexican-American population of the United States, as well as the newly arrived Mexican immigrants. Is the border between the United States and Mexico a dividing line or a bridge? Do the Mexican-Americans born in the United States have a common cultural heritage with the recent arrivals, or do the newcomers threaten the established position of the native Mexican-Americans? There are a variety of answers to all of these questions and the essayists take them up in meticulous detail. Several points do emerge. One is that the common cultural heritage idea of the Chicano movement does not coincide with the assimilation emphasis of the more traditional and conservative Lulacs and members of the GI Forum. While the essays may tend to emphasize the more radical approach favored by some groups, it should be evident that this is a minority opinion even among recently arrived immigrants.

The last essay in the series, by the editor of the book, does bring out the apparent closing of the ranks among Mexican-Americans when the tide of popular opinion in the United States began to turn against Mexican immigration. The traditional assimilation oriented organizations such as the Lulacs changed their positions and

made common cause with the more radical Chicanos to oppose the restrictive legislation then being considered by the U.S. Congress which limited the flow of Mexican immigration and imposed sanctions on employers who hired undocumented workers. Unfortunately public actions have gone much further in that direction since this essay was written. Proposition 187 has been passed in California by a popular majority and is only prevented from implementation by the courts. The daily news informs us of current new restrictions being imposed on immigrants during the last hours of the 104th Congress.

The last part of this work is the most difficult to accept for those who follow the traditional assimilationist interpretation of immigration history. The editor offers essays reviewing scholarship that opens new vistas in the immigration debate. The authors of these essays tend to suggest that much of the scholarship and interpretation of the past has been myopic and unrealistic in that it was based upon the assumption that Mexican immigrants would eventually be assimilated into the mainstream culture of the United States. They argue that if this was true in the past for other immigrant groups, it is no longer valid for modern Mexican immigration. They note the painfully slow process of assimilation for the Mexican diaspora contrasted to the relatively rapid acculturation of earlier immigrant groups. The essayists argue that the

new reality created by the globalization of the economy makes the old assimilationist interpretation inadequate. They suggest that if business organizations and investment capital are now transnational and can move beyond national boundaries casually and with little hindrance or restriction, then labor should be considered in a similar manner. They insist that workers now move in cyclical patterns to satisfy the needs of the economies and that they will not remain permanently in any locale. If this interpretation is to have any validity and acceptance by those favoring the older traditional approach, it must be articulated more clearly and more convincingly than it is in the essays presented in this volume.

The summary of Mexican immigration history is excellent. The review of conflicting concepts of the status of Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants to the United States is a valuable addition to the study of this dynamic issue. The call for a new interpretation of immigration history, however, is too novel and challenging to be easily or readily accepted by those supporting the more comfortable traditionalist views. Its real merit is that it should provoke traditionalists to reexamine many of their basic concepts of immigration history and policy which, up to this point, they have taken for granted. This is especially true if they are not involved in actual ongoing research on the subject.

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