



**John H. Flores.** *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018. 252 pp. \$28.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-08342-6.

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When migrants leave their home countries, they bring with them the politics of the homeland. For Mexican migrants to the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, these politics were complicated indeed—shaped by a violent revolution, a religious war, and radical political currents on the left as well as the right. It is no wonder, then, that Mexican communities across the country were impacted, and sometimes divided, by these political developments back home.

In *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War*, John H. Flores investigates how the Mexican Revolution “unfolded on the streets and in the neighborhoods of Chicago” (p. 15). In doing so, he demonstrates that the Mexican Revolution was transnational and shows how Mexican communities in Chicagoland—the area that includes Chicago and the surrounding area, including the Indiana cities of East Chicago and Gary—remained connected to Mexico, and influenced by Mexican politics, throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Flores’s work is a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship that uses archival material from both sides of the border to examine how political events in Mexico shaped migrant life in the United States. Scholars such as Douglas

Monroy, George Sánchez, Elliot Young, Gabriela Arredondo, Emilio Zamora, Nancy Aguirre, and I have all published studies that demonstrate the ways that different Mexican groups enacted the politics of the homeland in the United States. Flores, however, accomplishes something unique: he investigates how Mexican migrants of different political backgrounds competed with each other in the United States across many decades. His work underscores the important point that Mexican migrants were never a monolithic group, but rather were often divided along political lines that reflected when they came, where in Mexico they came from, and the circumstances of their migration.

Throughout the book, Flores categorizes Mexican immigrants during this period as either “liberals,” “traditionalists,” or “radicals” and describes how the changing fortunes of these three groups affected Mexican community formation in Chicagoland. Using a variety of archival sources from national and local collections on both sides of the border, including naturalization records, consular records, local Spanish-language newspapers, and oral histories, he presents a nuanced and illuminating portrait of the diverse and ever-changing Mexican migrant community in the Midwest.

The book is clearly written and proceeds chronologically as well as along a captivating narrative arc. In chapter 1, Flores begins with the arrival of middle-class Mexican liberals in the early 1920s. He shows how these progressive men and women, largely sympathetic to the politics of the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), founded social welfare organizations to help other Mexican migrants in a variety of ways, creating access to education, financial resources, and criminal justice. They sought to create political communities that fostered patriotism and pride in a Mexican identity. Just a few years later, however, Chicagoland saw the arrival of the “traditionalists”—conservative exiles from west-central Mexico who fled the Cristero War (1926-29), held conservative political views, and “encouraged Mexican Catholics to become politically active” (p. 67). These newer arrivals rejected the anticlerical politics of the liberals, often clashing with them rhetorically in the pages of competing newspapers (*México* for the liberals, *El Ideal Mexicano* for the traditionalists). In chapter 2, Flores investigates the ways that these traditionalists built community by forming organizations, launching fundraisers, collaborating with Mexican and US clergy, and constructing Catholic churches, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, that would become centers for traditionalist Mexicans in Chicagoland for decades.

The differences between Mexican liberal and traditionalist viewpoints are the subject of chapter 3, which explores the opposing ways that these groups perceived empire, race, and gender. Flores finds that liberals, who created coalitions with other Spanish-speaking communities in Chicago, were more skeptical of US imperialism and racism and had a tendency to idealize Mexico’s indigenous past: “through historiography, iconography, poetry, plays, and other cultural productions, liberals asserted their brownness” (p. 81). Traditionalists, on the other hand, lauded the United States for the religious freedom that they lacked in Mexico and emphasized the European contributions to Mexican culture. It is in this chapter,

too, that Flores reveals one of his most interesting findings from his exhaustive examination of naturalization records: that liberals, who were critics of US policies, often rejected US citizenship, while traditionalists, who felt alienated from the Mexican revolutionary government, preferred to naturalize as US citizens.

Both liberals and traditionalists were deeply impacted by the mass deportations of Mexicans in the wake of the Depression, which caused the population of Mexicans in Chicagoland to decline precipitously. Yet this event did not put an end to the complex political developments within Mexican communities there. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), a growing radical Left in Mexico made inroads into Mexican communities in Chicagoland, where a new group—the Frente Popular Mexicano—began advocating both an anti-imperial Mexican nationalism and international labor rights. Forging alliances with Mexican progressives at the University of Chicago, radicals at the Mexican consulate, journalists, and other activists, the Frente promoted education as a means to transform ordinary Mexicans into radicals. Its members also promoted a pan-Latino solidarity, collaborating with anti-Machado Cubans, Spanish Republicans, and other Spanish-speaking activists in Chicago. Ultimately, however, Mexican Catholic traditionalists, as well as Mexican liberals, came to believe the Frente was too radical and dangerous, and its membership declined.

Despite the weakening and ultimate disappearance of the Frente, radicals and traditionalists found common cause in their support for unionization during and after the late 1930s. In chapter 5, Flores explores the story of Mexican labor organizing, deploying a fascinating biographical analysis of Refugio Román Martínez, a radical immigrant who joined the Frente and then became a labor organizer, while refusing—like many radicals—to obtain US citizenship. At the same time, Flores describes how traditionalists also increasingly joined labor unions, particularly

those that “respected workers’ religious beliefs” (p. 133). In contrast to the radicals, however, the traditionalists coupled their labor activism with US citizenship drives, a get-out-the-vote operation, and support for the Democratic Party.

The strategy of the traditionalists was ultimately the winning one for Mexicans in Chicago, for, as Flores explains in chapter 6, the 1950s saw the demise of the radical wing of the revolutionary generation, thanks in large part to repressive actions by the US government. In 1954, in the wake of a panic about undocumented Mexican migrants, the US government launched Operation Wetback and deported hundreds of thousands of Mexican laborers. During the same period, radicals and labor activists alike were aggressively persecuted and many were interrogated by the INS and targeted for deportation. Refugio Martínez, who had never become a US citizen, was one of these and was tragically deported to Mexico, where he died just a few weeks later. As a result, the Mexican community in Chicagoland shifted away from radical politics, and its leaders instead focused on integration. By the 1960s, the movement was ultimately led by “cultural pluralists who affirmed their Mexican heritage while fighting for their place in the United States as ethnic Americans” (p. 163).

If Flores were to write a sequel, it would be worthwhile to continue the narrative into and beyond the 1970s, when Chicagoland—and the rest of the United States—began to receive a new and immense wave of Mexican migrants, many of whom were undocumented. It would be very interesting to know how these post-1970s arrivals were shaped by the history of the earlier communities. Yet the book accomplishes far more than it leaves out: it incorporates the perspectives of Mexican migrants from various class backgrounds, from different parts of Mexico, and across genders and racial groups. By examining how Mexicans formed alliances with Puerto Ricans, Nicaraguans, Spaniards, and Cubans, Flores

also provides a fascinating window into a pan-Latino Chicago that has gone understudied. All in all, Flores’s book is a remarkable contribution to a growing literature on Mexican migrant politics.

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