

Rows of Memory: Journeys of a Migrant Sugar-Beet Worker

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the most radical actions against German Americans and the German language during the war.

What will most interest scholars focused on other parts of the United States, however, is DeWitt's success in reading widely across the state's records. That has allowed her to demonstrate, for example, that not all English-language newspapers were equally opposed to these communities. Nor did the English- or German-language papers react consistently to events leading up to and during the war. While there were general trends in the attacks and condemnations, not everyone followed suit; thus one finds denouncements of British aggressions in many of Missouri's English-language newspapers, calls for loyalty in many of the German-language ones, and a striking absence of much war coverage and anti-German propaganda in both. Those observations provide us with valuable insights into the complexities behind the rather pat narratives about the rise and fall of German America. It is safe to assume that scholars could easily build upon them if they took up DeWitt's call to pursue similar rural studies in other states.

Rows of Memory: Journeys of a Migrant Sugar-Beet Worker, by Saúl Sánchez. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. xxviii, 210 pp. Illustrations, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$21.00 paperback.

Reviewer Brian D. Behnken is associate professor of history and U.S. Latino/a Studies at Iowa State University. He is the author of *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (2011).

For generations Mexican and Mexican American agricultural workers cyclically traversed the United States to perform a variety of functions on American farms. Much has been written on states such as California and Texas, but the role of the Mexican farm worker in the Northwest and Midwest is less well understood. Saúl Sánchez's *Rows of Memory* expands our knowledge of Mexican Americans in the Northwest and Midwest, and Iowa in particular. Complementing scholarly accounts such as Juan Garcia's *Mexicans in the Midwest*, Kathleen Mapes's *Sweet Tyranny*, and Jim Norris's *North for the Harvest* as well as autobiographical accounts such as Elva Treviño Hart's *Barefoot Heart*, it provides a complex and deeply inspiring story of one man's journey from migrant worker to college professor. *Rows of Memory* also includes an excellent introductory essay by University of Iowa history professor Omar Valerio-Jiménez.

Like other migrant workers, the Sánchez family began work in the spinach fields of Texas's winter garden region, their home base in many ways. When young Saúl was a child, his parents decided to travel for

sugar beet work in the Northwest and Midwest. Sánchez's father, a hard-nosed, hard-working man, was soon able to time out growing seasons with perfect accuracy. The family would help plant onions in Minnesota and beets in Iowa in the spring; the beets would then be thinned and blocked in May or June. While the beets matured, the family would venture back to Minnesota to harvest onions, returning to Iowa to harvest beets in the late summer. The family also worked in Washington, California, and a host of other states. One of their more profitable ventures came on a visit to Iowa when they befriended a tomato farmer near Muscatine. That chance meeting led to a long working relationship with that Iowa family.

Besides the agricultural work, which the author captures nicely, Sánchez also explains some of the educational issues he and his siblings dealt with in local schools. Like other migrant children, they frequently started school late in the year and suffered from segregation or perceptions of social or cultural difference from their Anglo classmates. Nevertheless, he writes, "we were obedient students. For us to progress meant just that: to faithfully do our homework and attend to whatever schoolwork our teachers assigned." Sánchez also noted what was for him and many Mexican-origin people an uncomfortable truth: "What we were faced with was no less than the ugly truth of being the descendants of a defeated people: to survive we had to obey" (112). It could be argued that this obedience served Sánchez well, as he excelled at school and eventually went on to graduate from college, where the book concludes.

This is an excellent account of a farm laborer's experiences and the struggle children sometimes encounter within their families when they desire to do something more than farm work. There are many poignant and beautifully written passages in the book. Take, for example, an account of the family moving their belongings into the housing provided by Iowa farmers (in this case a converted pigsty). Sánchez notes that of their possessions the "crowning jewel" was a two-burner kerosene stove upon which his mother cooked up about 400 handmade tortillas a week for the family. Reflecting on this memory, Sánchez reconsiders what he had written previously and notes, "The real jewel was my mother" (167-68). The community they and other migrant workers built, their innate sense of grace and kindness, and the dogged determination that kept this and other similar families together is a beautiful story, one that Sánchez richly tells.