

The Latina/o Midwest Reader

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The Latina/o Midwest Reader, edited by Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox. Latinos in Chicago and the Midwest. Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xii, 332 pp. Illustrations, chart, tables, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Dionicio Valdés is professor emeritus of history at Michigan State University. He is the author of *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (2000) and *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917–1970* (1991).

The Latina/o Midwest Reader is an interdisciplinary anthology of 17 essays, plus an introduction and afterword, that examines various aspects of the experience of an increasingly diverse and rapidly growing population in the region between the Rocky and Allegheny Mountains. It is based on papers initially presented at a symposium at the University of Iowa in 2013. The authors examine a range of topics, most of them specific midwestern case studies, five of which focus on Iowa. The essays are grouped into five sections, examining geography and place, history and workers, education, performance, and non-electoral political activism. The authors represent diverse disciplinary approaches and a range of viewpoints.

The editors emphasize that one aim of the volume is “to challenge the notion that Latinas/os are newcomers to the Midwest” (2). That challenge extends, at least implicitly, to intensifying negative stereotypes in the national political arena, including claims that Latinas/os have different values, pose a threat to older residents and to national unity, and therefore do not belong. Each essay challenges one or more of the stereotypes in distinct ways.

The essays in part one, “The Browning of the Midwest,” emphasize facets of the expansion and intensification of Latina/o cultural geography, as a population that first spread from Texas and Mexico to a handful of locations starting more than a century ago, primarily in search of short-term, temporary work, over time became an increasingly rooted population that has spread across the region, even living in small towns on the prairies. A case study based on a bicycling research trip challenges the myth that Latinas/os have different values or pose a threat, providing cases consistent with the current neoliberal trope that demonstrate successful entrepreneurs and elected political representatives. Two subsequent essays examine the longstanding link between Texas and the Midwest and a more recent one between Lorraine, Illinois, and Jiménez, Nuevo León, in which workers participate in a labor migration circuit linked to the broomcorn industry.

Two of the essays in part two, on history and labor, focus on Chicago. The first examines the bleak life of Mexican immigrant workers in the South Chicago steel mills during the generation following their first arrival at the start of World War I; the second focuses on Mexican and Puerto Rican workers who arrived during and after World War II. The section ends with a fine short study of how workers recruited to Perry, Iowa, initially as meatpackers, challenge racism and marginalization, sometimes by living "below the radar" or living in "parallel worlds," at other times by asserting their own humanity more forcefully by speaking Spanish and playing their favorite music with Spanish lyrics at high volume.

Three articles on education in part three demonstrate how Latinas/os challenge inaccurate negative stereotypes. Like all immigrant groups to the United States, they adopt the dominant idiom more rapidly than do immigrants to any other nation in the world. Furthermore, they learn the language most rapidly when they simultaneously study and learn Spanish not simply as a transition to English but in its own right, which simultaneously results in learning other materials more effectively. Another article demonstrates that immigrant parents care deeply about how their children fare in school but are stymied by institutional ignorance. A final article confirms that disciplinary Latina/o Studies will thrive in academia only with ongoing pressure from students and the community.

Essays in part four, on performance, examine the work of artist Ana Mendieta in Iowa, the defiant artistry of Chicago drag Queen Ketty Teanga, and the formation of El Museo del Norte in Detroit.

Finally, in part five, on movement politics, the authors examine civil rights struggles in the Mennonite Church; the Chicago Young Lords Organization; Iowa-based support for the late-1960s United Farm Workers grape boycott; Latina leadership in Wisconsin and Iowa, and the contemporary activism and practices of the Chicago-based Immigration Youth Justice League.

With its range of topics, interdisciplinary focus, and diverse methodology, the volume is directed toward interested readers and introductory college courses in ethnic and Latina/o studies. Many of the case studies are well researched and insightful, particularly in documenting changes in the past generation. However, the quality is uneven, and the introductory essay detracts from the overall work, suffering from careless writing and a weak grasp of the history that ties the essays together. The editors' assertion that "ethnic Mexicans began arriving in the region to work in the sugar beet industry as early as the 1880s" is flawed. Without Mexicans, the industry became established in the region only in the 1890s and first two decades of the twentieth century, and recruit-

ment of Mexicans began only after company experiments to employ local labor failed. In fact, ethnic Mexicans entered the region in significant numbers prior to the 1880s. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Mexican vaqueros from Texas worked the cattle drives from Texas to Kansas during the industrial boom of the era. Before that, starting in 1821 with the opening of the Santa Fe Trail, Mexican teamsters and traders delivered goods between Santa Fe and St. Louis. Still earlier, during the United States War of Independence in the 1770s and 1780s, ethnic Mexican soldiers representing the Spanish Crown occupied several locations in the region. Also in the late eighteenth century, residents of the Louisiana Territory under Spanish control, ethnic Mexicans, received land grants and established residences in the region. Enterprising and imaginative archaeological and anthropological research will elaborate and enhance our knowledge of these and earlier links between the ancestors of Latinas/os and the region currently referred to as the Midwest.

Regarding the issue of identity, some of the authors problematize the terms *Latino*, *Latina*, and *Latin@* but inexplicably neglect the very important popular term *Latinx*, which for many reasons has gained widespread acceptance and usage in the twenty-first century.

Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists, by Andrea-Teresa Arenas and Eloisa Gómez. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. xx, 290 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Janet Weaver is assistant curator at the Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries. She is the author of "Barrio Women: Community and Coalition in the Heartland" in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*, edited by Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine (2011).

Coauthored by Andrea-Teresa Arenas and Eloisa Gómez, *Somos Latinas* brings to light the powerful life stories of 25 Wisconsin Latina activists to underscore the significance of grassroots community activism in making change from the 1950s to the present. Through the lens of these narrators, readers gain insight into the value of a "woman-centered" community engagement and the discipline and persistence of these *madres*, whose activism often centered on building community and contributing to the good of the whole in the places where they lived. It is entirely fitting that the foreword to *Somos Latinas* is written by renowned Chicana civil rights activist Dolores Huerta, whose lifelong advocacy on behalf of farmworkers and women began with her first-hand experience in community organizing through the Community Service Organization (CSO) in California.