

REVIEWS

Maria's Journey

By Ramón Arredondo and Trisha Hull Arredondo

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In 1932, Paul Schuster Taylor, a rural sociologist from the University of California at Berkeley, published his now classic study *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*. At about the same time that Taylor was working in the Calumet region, Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio was completing *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (1930), a penetrating work that was the first to document the connections between emigrant-sending areas in Mexico and immigrant destinations and settlements across the United States. In a second book, *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story* (1931), Gamio presented a pioneering ethnographic account from interviews of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S., some in the same places where Taylor was conducting his field studies.

There is no reason to suspect that these researchers from the first decades of the twentieth century

would have known Maria and Miguel Arredondo, immigrants from hard-scrabble Guanajuato, Mexico, who were struggling to make a better life for themselves, their ten children, and one mother-in-law in East Chicago, Indiana. Yet the Arredondos were living the very life that the sociologist Taylor and the anthropologist Gamio sought to document in their studies.

Maria's Journey is part memoir and part family biography, told by Ramón Arredondo, the second youngest of the children, and his wife Trisha Hull Arredondo. As historian James Lane remarks in his foreword, the work is a reliable case study of Mexican family dynamics and Mexican immigrant experience to the Calumet region. It follows Miguel and Maria from what Taylor and Gamio called the West Mexico sending region—centered on the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato—north across the border at Nuevo Laredo-Laredo and deep into the core

of the American industrial heartland, first to Chicago and then to Harbor Island, Indiana. There they face the inevitable issues of employment security and citizenship that confronted so many of their fellow immigrants; Maria is forced to return to Mexico while Miguel remains to work in the steel mills that were the economic salvation for so many *Mexicanos* who ventured *al norte* during the chaos of the Mexican Revolution at home.

The account also offers a testimonial of the lives and upbringing of the Arredondo children. An important sidebar in the family chronicle—one that contrasted with similar Mexican immigrant accounts grounded in the experience of migrant farm labor—is Miguel's role as an urban labor activist and champion of the local union. This passion is passed on to one son who becomes a leader in the union.

But the heart and soul of the memoir, extending over decades to the present, resides in Maria, the mother who holds the family together through stern conviction, faith, and a persistent will. Her story is a drama that will be recognized by many readers of immigrant ancestry who have lived the same experience as children of such a matriarch. And that may be the book's most important contribution. Through their telling, the Arredondos present a compelling

example of the lives documented by scholars like Taylor and Gamio. *Maria's Journey* is a welcome addition to the larger story of the Mexican immigrant experience because it offers us a view from within, not only adding flesh to the bone of leaner academic texts, but revealing the spirit and drive along with the disappointments and sorrows of immigration that are in some ways unique to the Mexican experience in America and in others universal to migrant stories around the world.

Maria's Journey reveals how the immigrant experience, passed through several generations, has transformed Mexicans into Americans of Mexican descent. That story is not simply history; it is a living experience still unfolding in cities and towns across America.

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