

The Latina/o Midwest Reader

Edited by Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Santiago Vasquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pp. 352. Notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$95.00; paper, \$28.00.)

In their introduction to *The Latina/o Midwest Reader*, the editors state that one of the motivations for this volume was the need to dispel the notion that Latinas/os are newcomers to the Midwest. The continuous Latina/o presence in this area since the 1880s becomes a thread that connects a wide variety of topics, methodologies, and perspectives, even if sometimes at the cost of unavoidable repetition of historical facts throughout the volume. The text is ambitious in scope, as it sets to recognize, document, and celebrate both the past and present of very diverse Latina/o Midwest populations, from large urban centers to small rural communities, while trying at the same time to compare these narratives to those that characterize other areas of established Latina/o immigration in the country. The collection represents a significant step in filling the gaps of our understanding of the Latina/o experience in the Midwest, an area relatively neglected by the literature when compared to the attention received by the more traditional enclaves on the East and West coasts. The relevance of the Midwest as an area for further research is also highlighted by the remarkable demographic growth this area has experienced in recent years: the Latina/o population doubled in this region between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, and “in eight of the twelve states

that make up the Midwest, the Latina/o population grew more than 73 percent over the same period” (p. 126). The volume combines a focus on the historical, social, and cultural history of Latinas/os, with an emphasis on activism and personal oral histories. It will appeal to a wide audience, while also offering references to further literature for more in-depth analysis.

The work is divided into five parts. Part I, “The Browning of the Midwest,” discusses the shift in Latina/o immigration since the 1990s, away from the traditional destinations and into new gateways of entry, such as the rural Midwest. The rise of Latina/o immigrants in small towns of Iowa, Minnesota, or Illinois, recruited by meatpacking and other food processing industries, has brought about economic, demographic, and community revitalization, but also very palpable social tensions. Louis Mendoza speaks of a cultural paradox, “in which the way of life of elderly whites is often preserved by the labor of new immigrants, who also bring change” (p. 31). Part II, “Essential Laborers and Neighbors,” discusses the history of the arrival of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans to Chicago and Northwest Indiana, first attracted by the jobs in the steel mill industry, and later as part of the Bracero Program of the 1940s and 1950s. Part III, “La educación

adelanta,” explores connections between minority languages, education, and identity through a focus on Spanish in the Midwest. As Spanish use and proficiency decreases across generations, speaking Spanish is no longer perceived as a central element in a Latina/o identity. Other chapters illustrate how the activism of teachers and researchers has played an important role in advocating for the survival of Latina/o Studies in the Midwest and in giving a voice to the parents of Latina/o children. Part IV, “Performeando in the Midwest,” highlights the role of the Midwest as a site of immigration and cultural crossing from an artistic perspective. Finally, Part V, “Movimientos” explores the history of Mexican and Puerto Rican political and social activism. From youth organizations in Chicago, to the leadership of Latinas in Wisconsin and Iowa, these groups appear as agents of immigrant activism, workplace change, and community building.

An issue that figures prominently in the collection is the nature of the narratives imposed upon ethnic communities as a means to “justify policies of marginalization and disempowerment” (p. 14). As a response, several chapters address how to resist that fictionalized representation, “through the telling of stories from within communities” (p. 9). Ethnographic accounts, personal narratives, sociolinguistic studies, and oral histories function as counter-narratives that serve to create a new cultural practice. With a collection of essays that aim at assembling such oral histories, archival materials, and partnerships between scholars and communities, this volume itself succeeds at “integrating Latina/o Midwest into the broader Latina/o studies field imaginary” (p. 17).

EVA MENDIETA is Professor of Spanish, Indiana University Northwest

doi: 10.2979/indimagahist.114.3.10