



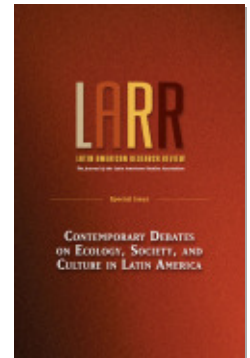
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MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS

Permanent, Cyclical, Temporary, and Forced

Judith Adler Hellman
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Four Generations of Norteños: New Research from the Cradle of Mexican Migration. Edited by Wayne A. Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, and Scott Borger. La Jolla: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2009. Pp. xii + 250. \$24.50 paper.

Migration from the Mexican Mixteca: A Transnational Community in Oaxaca and California. Edited by Wayne A. Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, Jorge Hernández-Díaz, and Scott Borger. La Jolla: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2009. Pp. x + 268. \$29.50 paper.

Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada. By María Cristina García. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Pp. xvi + 274. \$24.95 paper.

American Guestworkers: Jamaicans and Mexicans in the U.S. Labor Market. By David Griffith. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. Pp. xv + 234. \$59.95 cloth.

When, after thirty years of work on other issues, I stumbled into migration studies through research I had conducted on Senegalese street vendors in Italy, it quickly became clear that inquiry into migration has endless possibilities, in part because migration is a phenomenon that has spanned centuries, especially if we consider its national and international aspects.¹ Geographically, migration knows no bounds, encompassing not only movement from poor to rich regions—from Africa to Europe, South Asia to the Gulf states, Latin America and the Caribbean to the United

1. Faced with the dilemma of fixing a start date for what we would today call a globalized world, or, as he put it, “the interlocking networks of human interaction that extended across each of the two still separate hemispheres,” Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 24–25, chose 1400 as the point when it could be said that “wide-ranging linkages among populations” were firmly established. Migration in the Americas began before the European conquest, if not with the movement of Asians across the Bering Strait.

States and Canada—but also cross-border journeys that bring Haitians to the Dominican Republic, Bolivians to Argentina, and Salvadorans to Honduras, not to speak of Albanians to Italy, Zimbabweans to Botswana, and Bangladeshis to India.

In terms of approaches, migration studies is literally a free-for-all, with both academic and popular writers seeing the possession of almost any disciplinary or interdisciplinary training, or any inclination, as qualifying them to study and speak to the issue. Researchers often feel pressured to show the relevance of their inquiry to public policy, yet almost any analysis of migration readily finds a place in ongoing, if not never-ending, debates in the “receiving countries” of North America and Europe. In this respect, grant proposals for research in this area practically write themselves, as the rationales needed for the work proposed appear on the front pages of newspapers throughout the advanced capitalist world.

In a field so rich in material, so accessible to all, so fast growing, and fundamentally so disorderly, it is not surprising that there are frequent complaints about the lack of a coherent theoretical framework or paradigm. With respect to Latin America and the Caribbean, we do find masses of data provided by groups devoted to collecting, processing, and disseminating statistics on migration, most notably the Pew Hispanic Center as well as the data bank of the Mexican Migration Project and the Latin American Migration Project, both housed at the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. In addition, there is a vast and ever-expanding body of microstudies of individuals and communities in both sending and receiving societies. However, there is little in the way of elaborated frameworks of analysis, and many studies make no claim to one. Terms such as *social network theory* may excite the expectation that at least some sophisticated analysis will follow. But often this important-sounding phrase leads only to the suggestion that there is a correlation between having contacts in the receiving society and the likelihood that people who have them will migrate, or that their project of migration will succeed.²

Debates that once enlivened scholarly gatherings have also largely ended—silenced, as it were—by an excess of agreement. For example, by the time that the editors of a landmark collection on immigrants in New York sat down in the late 1990s to hash out definitions and possibly different understandings of *transnationalism* as part of their introduction, discussions on the utility and limitations of that term were largely over.

2. J. Jarvis, A. Ponce, S. Rodríguez, and L. Cajigal García, “The Dynamics of Migration: Who Migrates? Who Stays? Who Settles Abroad?” in *Four Generations of Norteleños: New Research from the Cradle of Mexican Migration*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, and Scott Borger (La Jolla: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2009), 24.

By then, almost everyone was convinced that cyclical migration was and is a reality, that it is possible to feel rooted or rootless in more than one society, and that the transnational lifestyle and subjective experience of one generation may or may not pass on to its children.³ With the tightening of border controls after September 11, 2001, history would provide its own critique of the notion of cyclical migration, as it became less and less an option for migrants like those Mexicans who, notwithstanding their undocumented status, had been accustomed to return home for at least the annual celebration of the village saint, if not for Christmas and Easter as well.

Thus, as we weigh the huge body of literature on migration, looking for clear patterns from which to construct meaningful generalizations, we find rich resources but no grand theory. We also find trends and outcomes so varied that we are constrained to make broad observations, often stating the obvious, as when we note that migration responds to economic shifts in both sending and receiving societies; that migration both shreds and reinforces family and community ties; that its impact on the village, town, or urban neighborhood left behind can be positive, negative, or, more likely, both; that remittances can bring greater dependence or greater autonomy to the individuals and communities that receive them; that migration both undermines and reinforces the church's influence; that migration can intensify or compromise the cultural identity of migrants; that women, men, and children experience migration or remaining behind in very different ways; and that debates on how to regulate migration have given rise to bizarre political alliances in every country where they have unfolded.⁴

The books reviewed in this essay give only a limited idea of the huge range of work on migration in recent years. From an original store of more than twenty titles not yet reviewed in *Latin American Research Review* (despite four other review essays comprising some eighteen works on the topic since 2003), five were deemed more appropriate for review by a historian, and another cluster of works was set aside for an essay on the legacy of migration among second-generation immigrants. The four works in this essay nevertheless feature a wide range of approaches and themes while addressing, in particular, the issues of undocumented migration, contract labor, and forced migration.

3. Héctor Cordero-Guzmán, Robert C. Smith, and Ramón Grosfoguel, "Introduction: Migration, Transnationalization and Ethnic and Racial Dynamics in a Changing New York," and Georges E. Fournon and Nina Glick Schiller, "The Generation of Identity: Redefining the Second Generation within a Transnational Social Field," both in *Migration, Transnationalization, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 1–34 and 58–86.

4. Judith Adler Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants: The Rock and the Hard Place* (New York: New Press, 2008), 211–231.

The two volumes edited by Wayne A. Cornelius and his colleagues focus on communities in Tlacuitapa (Jalisco) and San Miguel Tlacotepec (Oaxaca) and present the fifth and sixth installments of ongoing work by the Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program (MMFRP). Based at the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD), and directed by Cornelius, the MMFRP sends out some thirty graduate and advanced undergraduate students from UCSD and partner universities in Mexico at three-year intervals to survey the inhabitants of three small towns in Jalisco, Oaxaca, and the Yucatán, as well as their satellite communities in the United States. The researchers administer a detailed questionnaire, do follow-up interviews, and record ethnographic observations, not of a sample—random or otherwise—but of the entire population of the three migrant-sending communities.⁵

The results of an approach so comprehensive are rich, to say the least. The questionnaire (reproduced as an appendix to each volume) covers the demographic profile of respondents, their migratory history, their experiences in crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, their inclination or concrete intent to migrate, their perception of border enforcement, remittances, and their attempts to regularize their status in the United States. Questions also deal with migrants' assessment of the quality of their lives in the United States, how they maintain their cultural identity, their feelings about family life both in the United States and in Mexico, their attitudes toward the town they left behind, and the state of their health in both settings.

In both volumes, each chapter presents an analysis of one part of the questionnaire. Thus, students initially trained to conduct surveys and follow-up interviews reemerge as members of a team of between two and five coauthors. Such collectivities seldom produce felicitous prose, yet in this case, the writing is remarkably clear and the analysis of data is stimulating and generally highly persuasive. This is because in-depth interviews allow the teams to get behind the categories of the formal questionnaire to make qualitative assessments. For example, the introductory chapter on San Miguel Tlacotepec reveals that, of the 8 percent of the economically active population identified in the survey as "self-employed businessmen," most are elderly people who weave hats, fans, brooms, and baskets from palm fronds and then sell those articles on Fridays in the neighboring market town. This is a self-employed business, to be sure, but not much of a living.

5. For the Yucatecan case study in this series, see Xóchitl Bada, "The Attractions and Realities of the United States," review of *Mayan Journeys: The New Migration from Yucatán to the United States*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, and Pedro Lewin Fischer, *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 2 (2010): 236–244.

Because the MMFRP project returns to the same set of communities on a three-year cycle, it has a longitudinal dimension not present, for example, in the downloadable data of the Mexican Migration Project at Princeton, which shows only a snapshot of migration's reality. In contrast, the MMFRP offers a thick family album that spans time and generations.

Read either as single case studies or in comparative perspective, these books have a great deal to say about the motivations behind migration; the likelihood that migrants will obtain visas, green cards, or citizenship; the mechanics of crossing the border; and the structural opportunities for employment, housing, and access to social services in the United States. They also explore the impact of technology on how migrants keep in touch with those left behind, the use (productive or otherwise) to which remittances are put, civic participation in sending and receiving communities, and migration's impact on educational attainment in Mexico and the United States. Both volumes examine the prospects for assimilation in receiving communities, but the Jalisco study of a town that boasts a full four generations of migrants also offers an interesting chapter on dissimulation, or how migrants may become outsiders in their old hometowns.

The analysis of survey data yields an assortment of interesting findings, both intuitive and otherwise. One surprising result from Tlacuitapa, Jalisco, was that migrants whose adult children also reside in the United States were only slightly less likely to retire in Mexico than those without settled offspring. In another finding, the perception of severe discrimination against Mexicans made respondents no more likely to engage in political activity in the United States than other migrants who are more satisfied with their status there. Other surprises come to light in the study of Tlacotepec, Oaxaca, where the entire population has free access to computers providing Internet service in the central plaza, in contrast to emigrant relatives in California, who cannot afford similar connections of their own. Thus, along with low levels of literacy and a lack of training, the high cost of access to technology in the United States prevents Tlacotepenses from using the Internet as a cost-effective means to stay in touch, and the crowd in the central plaza is mainly comprised of young people playing computer games. Less surprising, for this reviewer, was the finding that remittances turn out to be a two-edged sword with respect to educational attainment. Money migrants send home can be used to support continued schooling in Mexico, where costs grow more burdensome at each successive academic stage. But the so-called culture of migration produced by remittances makes migration seem a more attractive and certain road to prosperity than continued attendance at school.⁶

6. In my own interviews in Zacatecas and Veracruz, respondents referred to the "contagion" of migration, which led many who in the past would have put aside money or even

Even a comprehensive and well-constructed survey is likely to have limitations. In looking at the ambivalence expressed toward U.S. culture, the four coauthors of the chapter on dissimilation report that only 33 percent of migrants indicate that “foreign books, films, and music harm Mexican culture” (171). However, to test the degree of acceptance or rejection of U.S. culture accurately, one would have done better to ask migrants their opinions not on books, films, and music but on the impact that settlement in the United States has had on central issues of family life, such as obedience and respect for parents, food preferences (and their health consequences), and exposure to gang culture. Similarly, the authors note that respondents were very reluctant to identify with the United States, feeling that to do so would make them “less Mexican.” Yet, at the same time, they find that many migrants express “local pride” in their new town, region, or especially state. This emotion speaks to the strength of the need to belong *somewhere* in the United States, which Mexicans feel even if they are not very assimilated and do not wish to be more assimilated in the United States.

Perhaps the most consistent finding of the two studies—one that carries forward from other volumes in the series⁷—is the futility of the enforcement schemes put into place since the Clinton administration. In the Jalisco volume, the chapter on border enforcement notes that “the higher probability of apprehension does not necessarily translate into a decreased likelihood of eventual success in crossing,” as “only one of seventy-six respondents who attempted to cross between 1993 and 2006 reported being unable to gain entry” (59–60). Moreover, in the Oaxaca volume, the chapter on techniques used in crossing the border finds that, “[a]lthough 48 percent of unauthorized migrants had been apprehended on their most recent trip to the United States, 97 percent eventually succeeded in entering, without having to return to Tlacotepec.” In all cases, those who were caught persisted until they managed to cross the border, and “‘eventual success’ rates among migrants interviewed in these studies have remained remarkably high and consistent, varying from 92 to 98 percent despite a continuous strengthening of border enforcement” (48). Thus, both studies point to the paradox that the billions of dollars poured into a real and virtual fence by the U.S. federal government do not dissuade migration but instead effectively seal into the United States the undocumented migrants who have already entered the country. Ironically, as the chapter on

sold off land to see their children through high school to dedicate those resources instead to sponsoring migration. Hellman, *World of Mexican Migrants*, 25–26.

7. See Lynn Stephen, “Expanding the Borderlands: Recent Studies on the U.S.-Mexico Border,” review of *Impacts of Border Enforcement on Mexican Migration: The View from the Sending Communities*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius and Jessa M. Lewis, *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 1 (2009): 266–277.

coyotaje in the Jalisco volume observes, the primary beneficiaries of tighter border enforcement have been the human smuggling networks; “[r]ather than putting [coyotes] out of business, the post-1993 U.S. border buildup has been a bonanza for them” (99).

The implications of these findings for public policy could not be clearer: enforcement does not alter migrants’ plans to enter the United States. Like the ex-braceros I interviewed in the north-central desert of Mexico in the late 1960s—who returned to pick cotton in Texas every year for at least a decade after the Bracero Program was shut down—and the undocumented migrants found in any region of the continental United States and Alaska today, the operative assumption of would-be migrants is that, if you do not make it across the border on the first attempt, you should simply try again until you are successful. Indeed, an observation in the Oaxaca volume underscores the profoundly rational nature of the decisions made by migrants, in contrast to the irrationality of U.S. policy makers: “[u]ndocumented entry will only decrease when the majority of potential migrants conclude that the costs and risks of illegal entry are greater than the potential benefits awaiting them on the other side of the border” (42).

The other books under review share the relevance to public policy of these volumes. Tellingly, the chapter on border-crossing methods in *Migration from the Mexican Mixteca* ends by stating that “current immigration policy generates ‘illegality’ by failing to provide sufficient legal avenues to live and work in the United States.” As a consequence, the authors conclude that “a guest worker program would be a more humane and effective way to increase the number of opportunities for legal entry into the United States” (58).

Anyone interested in whether a new guest-worker program might be a humane solution to illegal migration would do well to turn to David Griffith’s *American Guest Workers: Jamaicans and Mexicans in the U.S. Labor Market*. Griffith, professor of anthropology at East Carolina University, examines both the history and the future of contract labor in the United States, making an invaluable contribution to the immigration debate in an area that is crucial for several reasons.

First—at least in the case of Mexican migrants, who represent the overwhelming majority of those living without documents in the United States—a great many, if not most, have little or no interest in establishing themselves permanently in the country. The cyclical migration of Mexican laborers to the United States predates the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and is a traditional response to adversity still used today. Many migrants would prefer to secure well-paying and stable, if temporary, jobs in the United States, and to hold those just long enough to amass the funds necessary to finance personal and collective projects back home. Rather than aspiring to live an American dream, they seek to realize a Mexican dream best described as living their lives in Mexico with occasional

forays into the U.S. labor market to underwrite the purchase of land, the construction of a home, the establishment of a business, or the acquisition of capital equipment—whatever it takes to make life in Mexico more viable.⁸

A second reason to examine the option of guest workers is, unfortunately, because the expansion of a temporary work-visa program is the most progressive or, rather, least punitive proposal for immigration reform currently on the table in the off-and-on effort to “fix our broken system,” as the problem of migration is often described in political discourse. Unfortunately, it is today almost impossible to raise as a topic for reasonable debate the question of what a feasible and humane program of contract labor might be. Because the history of such programs in the United States has been so ugly, this discussion becomes too fraught with tension to permit serious consideration of policy alternatives.

Into this morass comes Griffith’s highly engaging book, which instructs us on the key differences between H-4a and H-4b visa programs, along with many other details about options to secure cheap and flexible labor for agriculture, fishing, food processing, and the hospitality industry. Griffith explains that temporary-worker programs allow applicants from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to work in the United States in agriculture, as well as in seasonal occupations such as seafood processing, forestry, tourism, and horse racing, under conditions that “create a class of foreign workers differentiated from U.S. working classes by their limited access to the labor market, their temporary residence, their ‘non-immigrant’ appellation, and their circumscribed human rights” (30).

However, before detailing this assortment of programs, past and present, Griffith takes us through the extraordinary development of Florida from its origins as a sparsely populated, malaria-ridden swamp. This is the story of the imposition on an unsuitable landscape of the singular will of the entrepreneur Henry Flagler, who pioneered the massive use of migrant labor to push a railroad down the Atlantic coast and through the swamps to Key West, and to construct his palatial Alcazar Hotel in St. Augustine. Griffith traces the hyperexploitation and racial segmentation found in those megaprojects, including the use of African Americans turned over by obliging sheriffs who had arrested them for vagrancy. In addition, Flagler recruited newly arrived immigrants from the north of the country, as well as vulnerable people from the Caribbean basin, whom he brought in under contract and then effectively enslaved through debt peonage. These techniques were adopted by sugar growers and the citrus and winter vegetable operations that rapidly developed as Flagler’s railway made the cultivation of those crops for the northeastern market economically viable.

8. Hellman, *World of Mexican Migrants*, 219–226.

Griffith evokes both the early history of modern Florida and an emerging world of cheap motels, labor camps, strip malls, rooming houses, and wooden tenements, a “modern” landscape very different from our imaginings of surf, sea, and palm trees, and one also at odds with the urban slums that most readers would associate with poverty as extreme as that endured by the workers Griffith interviewed. The setting is vivid, engaging, and important because, in tracing the history of contract labor in Florida, the landscape for which Flagler’s programs were invented, and the narrow class interests they served, Griffith leads us to understand the template that would later be used in similar programs all along the East Coast and as far north as apple country on the shores of Lake Ontario in upstate New York. We also come to understand how the state was used to further the needs of growers, large and small. Florida’s sugar producers, Griffith writes, were not only deeply involved in manipulating the political economy of Caribbean nations through exclusionary tariffs enacted on their behalf by Congress; they also lobbied for international agreements that led to the H-2 visa program, the predecessor of the H-2a and H-2b programs.

The forms of recruitment that evolved in Florida thus set a pattern for the whole country, spreading from Flagler’s railroad to sugar and tomato fields, citrus groves, poultry plants, meatpacking companies, and a host of other activities, such as crab picking, that were notorious for low wages and hazardous worksites, work that only the most vulnerable could be counted on to perform without complaint or absenteeism. Among the forms of victimization that contract workers suffered, Griffith lists the underpayment of wages, “blacklisting, under-reporting of injuries, illegal or unauthorized deductions from workers’ pay, [and] abuses of compulsory saving programs by Caribbean statesmen” in sending communities (42). Throughout, Griffith shows that these practices make contract labor inherently exploitative, irrespective of the personal characteristics and attitudes of particular employers or workers. In effect, the drive to maximize efficiency and flexibility in the workforce runs counter to the efforts of migrants, their advocates, and unions to regulate contract work so as to protect workers. Representatives of countries with binational agreements to supply contract laborers to employers in the United States, such as Jamaica, Mexico, and even Laos, are at best “paternal and condescending toward the workers” they are charged with protecting, when these officials are not simply too frightened to act with due diligence. A representative from an eastern Caribbean island explains: “If I advocate too hard for that worker, I’m liable to lose that placement to Mexico or Jamaica” (39–40). In essence, Griffith notes, “Contract labor programs that evolve in this way take their lead from classic debt peonage schemes, preying on vulnerable workers and enlisting the aid of the state in cheating workers even as they keep them in a kind of legal bondage” (42).

Thanks to Griffith's exhaustive knowledge of the social relations of production in each industry that uses contract labor, his excellent book takes us beyond the standard denunciation of the abuses to which poor people, unprotected by unions and adequate labor laws, may be subject. Although sugar production became the prototype of contract labor more generally in the United States, Griffith maintains that conditions in the industry arose from exceptional circumstances and manifested an extreme form of unequal power relations. Sugar growers and their allies in Congress and the Department of Labor made up an almost overwhelming force aligned against contract workers and their allies, not only in Congress and the Department of Labor but also in Rural Legal Services, Caribbean ministries, and other organizations charged with protecting workers' rights. It is thus potentially misleading to construe the use of contract labor in sugar production as indicative of how visa programs function elsewhere, for doing so "leads to overly instrumentalist conceptions of state power and fatalist views of capital's dominance." Even more troubling, Griffith argues, "it implies that many of those working in H-2 programs today lack the ability to speak for themselves or decide what is in their own best interests in light of the broader context of their lives" (43).

To provide this broader context, Griffith draws on his long-term ethnographic research, surveys, and in-depth interviews in rural Jamaica, Mexico, and a series of African American communities along the mid-Atlantic and southern coasts of the United States. We are taken to the Two Meetings watershed in the Yankee Valley of central Jamaica, where Griffith worked in the early 1980s. Here, by cultivating yams, beans, potatoes, cassavas, and other subsistence crops, together with fishing, goat herding, higgling, receiving remittances, and pooling resources from various households, local peasants could survive, if not prosper, from "multiple livelihoods." This fieldwork later paved the way for Griffith, in the 1980s, to interview Jamaican women on H-2b visas who were employed in the hotels of resort towns up and down the Carolina coast. The interviews provide rich and telling oral histories that illustrate the desperation, as well as the resilience and ingenuity, of Griffith's subjects.

Griffith also traces the shift from African American and West Indian labor to what he calls the Latinization of the temporary workforce. To understand this transition, we need to grasp the profound changes in the attitudes of African Americans following the civil rights movement, and the vast gulf that opened between older, generally female African American workers in industries such as crab picking and the younger women who, in the past, would have followed their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers into seafood-processing plants. We also have to understand the changing aspirations, opportunities, and attitudes toward labor in African American communities that once supplied field hands to agriculture, and maids

and gardeners to vacation resorts. The oral histories that Griffith presents are gripping and deeply moving. They include interviews with elderly women who—even without the dubious benefit of instruction on the political economy of globalization—well understand and identify with the young Mexican women who have taken the jobs in blue crab plants that their own daughters and nieces no longer seek. Thus, Griffith sees the Latinization of these jobs as an effect, and not the cause, of the movement of young African Americans out of the low-paying jobs they had historically occupied.

To understand better the dynamics of Latinization, in 1998–2000, Griffith interviewed some 734 Mexican H-2 workers, both at job sites in the United States and in their home communities in Mexico. Like the surveys of the Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program detailed in the books reviewed here, Griffith's interviews focus on the motivations of migration, the uses to which remittances are put, how social networks facilitate entry into the U.S. labor market, the personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, skills, education) of migrants, and how people who migrate differ from those who stay at home. Because Griffith's subjects come to the United States on work visas, there is no discussion of clandestine border crossings. However, Griffith's respondents recount harrowing travel experiences, all manner of rip-offs and exploitation, physical abuse, and even death at the hands of unscrupulous or criminal recruiters, along with negative assessments that contract workers give to the program itself.

To be sure, the process of Latinization reflects the expanded use of contract labor in a wide variety of workplaces and over a broader geographical area. However, Griffith also tracks how the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) provision reinforced the trend to hire Mexicans and Central Americans at the expense of African Americans and West Indians. This development is especially evident after U.S. sugar companies successfully lobbied Congress to exclude Jamaicans (who were universally acclaimed as the best cane cutters) from SAW status, fearing that they would become “an authorized labor force with free movement within the U.S. labor market” and accordingly “more militant in their opposition to underpayment of wages, unfair deductions and other abuses” (72).

Along the way, Griffith examines Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Work Program (SWAP), which might seem on its face to have resolved many of the problems of contract labor in the United States. However, although SWAP gives more protection to workers with respect to health care, housing, workers' compensation, and oversight, it does not alter the exploitation inherent in an arrangement that ties contract workers to a single employer, without the right to quit and offer their labor on a free market. They are not protected by unions, and their future participation in SWAP

rests on a positive recommendation from the grower to whom they were assigned for the duration of their contract, a provision that gives immense power to the employer.

American Guestworkers is built on research conducted over a quarter century and appears to have been written over an extended period of time. The effort to cross-reference topics spanning the period of research results in a certain amount of repetition, as each chapter is designed to stand on its own. Certainly, there are moments when one might wish for more orderly presentation, not to mention more subheadings to guide the reader. However, at its best, Griffith's writing is almost poetic, and the sections where he goes off on one of his historical side trips are never less than fascinating.

Yet one must ask, Does it make sense for poor people to become contract workers far away from their homes and loved ones? If, as Griffith intends, we consider this choice in the context of migrants' lives, the answer is yes. Can this sort of arrangement ever be other than exploitative? By ending with a discussion of transnational organizing by groups such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Griffith seems to suggest that fair working conditions do not exist without unions to redress the imbalance of power between contract workers and employers. Indeed, the final pages of his concluding section focus on contract workers who "jump ship," who simply walk off the job and disappear into the world of undocumented immigrants. In a way, this says all that needs to be said about the structural injustice of the guest-worker program currently in place in the United States.

Like the three books considered to this point, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* also deals with public policy. However, in focusing on the forced migration of Central American refugees in the 1980s and 1990s, María Cristina García's comparison of U.S. and Canadian approaches is not a sidebar, as it is for Griffith, but rather the central feature of the work. Indeed, for García, associate professor of history at Cornell University, a defining moment in North American history occurred with the different responses of Mexico, Canada, and the United States to the humanitarian crisis posed by millions of Central Americans displaced from their homelands by war and by military and paramilitary forces capable of the most heinous torture and abuse. In the number of refugees that each country accepted, the treatment and status accorded to refugees, and the conditions in which refugees lived in exile, one finds encapsulated the way in which each country related to its neighbors; to the inter-American system; to shifting domestic and regional politics; and, in the cases of Canada and Mexico in particular, to its own national identity and self-image.

García begins with the conflicts in Central America that produced the refugee crisis and the role that the United States played, both directly as a

military, political, and economic actor in the region and in support of the brutal regimes that, between 1974 and 1996, caused millions to flee their rural villages and urban barrios. In terms of the total population of the affected countries, this was among the greatest displacements of noncombatants in human history. In García's summary, the respect and concern for human rights under Jimmy Carter presents a striking contrast to the indifference to savagery of the regimes that the United States habitually supported in the name of anticommunism. Although U.S. foreign policy changed under Ronald Reagan and then George H. W. Bush, it continued to differ from those of both Mexico and Canada.

García also examines the resettlement of refugees, showing, oddly enough, that countries from which refugees were fleeing received others displaced by their neighbors, with Nicaraguans settling in El Salvador, Salvadorans heading to Guatemala, and Guatemalans crossing into Mexico. Some refugees moved along paths that they knew from traditional labor migration, as in the case of Salvadorans who fled to Honduras and Guatemalans who left for Chiapas, Mexico. But the attempt to escape death squads and terror also brought movement to new areas, with Guatemalans going to Belize, Nicaraguans to Costa Rica, and Salvadorans to Mexico. From those temporary sanctuaries, refugees would move onward to Mexico, the United States, and Canada, thus presenting challenges to the receiving countries. In three case studies, García examines how the settlement of refugees fit into the political projects of the three North American nations. She also provides a wealth of detail on humanitarian work by national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights monitoring organizations, trade unions, legal aid associations, local solidarity groups, formal religious institutions, and other grassroots assemblies. García underscores the degree to which the civic and social organizations were able to shape governmental policies regarding the reception of refugees.

The exodus of Guatemalans to Mexico offers the most straightforward narrative of the three cases. Mexico was culturally similar to Guatemala; it was familiar to workers who had engaged in cyclical labor migration before the wars; and because of Mexico's proximity, repatriation would be simple when the hostilities at home ended. Moreover, the majority of the more than one hundred thousand Guatemalans who fled to Mexico were Maya, culturally and linguistically linked to people whom they regarded as brethren across an artificial border. One of the most heartening details recounted by García is indeed the readiness of Mayan peasants, the poorest of the poor in Chiapas, to offer refugees land, food, clothing, and shelter from their own meager supplies.

Proximity to Central America is, nevertheless, only part of the story of Mexico's receipt of refugees. After the revolution, and certainly from the 1930s—when President Lázaro Cárdenas welcomed veterans of the

Spanish Civil War and then refugees fleeing the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, not to mention Leon Trotsky and U.S. communists driven out by McCarthyism—a central facet of Mexican national identity and of the legitimacy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was the depiction of Mexico as a haven for progressive thinkers and revolutionaries. This was, in fact, the political and emotional space that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara used to recruit and train a force to invade Cuba in 1956. And Mexico was the destination to which failed guerrillas from every corner of Latin America retreated to cure their wounds and strategize their next endeavors. Unfortunately, although García begins with an honor roll of the revolutionaries who found refuge in Mexico, she makes no mention of the political use to which PRI put the receipt of refugees, even after the party had abandoned any semblance of an authentically popular project.

In examining Mexico's response to humanitarian crisis in Central America, García stresses the role that the Catholic Church, and specifically the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas under Archbishop Samuel Ruiz, played in pressing for continued support of refugees and an end to forced repatriation of those who would be at risk if they returned home. At the same time, she recognizes that Mexico's policies were not simply a particularly sensitive response to pressure by civil society organizations. These policies also reflect Mexico's ambition to be the leader in Mesoamerica and a middle power in the community of nations, an ambition that, at the time, focused on securing a principal role in the Contadora negotiations to bring peace to Central America.

Although García does not allege that Mexico's policies toward refugees arose strictly from popular pressure and the efficacy of advocacy groups, there is no question that civil society is front and center in her analysis, not only in this chapter but also in those on the United States and Canada that follow. Indeed, other than noting (correctly) that a major problem in Mexico's relief effort was the corruption of the state actors who were supposed to deliver funds and services from the UN High Commission on Refugees to people on the ground, she has relatively little to say about domestic political concerns and their bearing on policy. In the chapter, García lists Mexican presidents one after the other, with dates in parenthesis to indicate the *sexenio* in which they held power. However, García does not explain which factions of the PRI supported the emergence of each leader. Nor does she address the role of the United States in the region or the adequacy of the positions Mexico took in both receiving refugees and the peace process.

These omissions anticipate the more serious imbalance between richly detailed, inspiring accounts of activists' efforts to protect refugees and the dearth of information on how local and national politics shaped each country's legislation on refugees. The chapter on Mexico describes the work of Catholic nuns and priests; Protestant missionaries; Mexican NGOs; in-

ternational volunteers; and as already noted, the tremendous generosity, caring, and solidarity of poor peasants in Chiapas. In the chapter on the United States, García presents the activists who lobbied Congress; others who moved refugee cases through the courts; communities that offered food, clothing, shelter, and jobs to refugees; and above all, the remarkable faith-based groups that smuggled vulnerable refugees across the border to safe houses in the United States and turned hundreds of churches, temples, and synagogues in thirty-nine states into sanctuaries for refugees.

García does not essentialize these activists or engage in hero worship. On the contrary, her sympathetic, yet highly perceptive, account reveals deep divisions in their movements. She outlines the schisms that competing strategies for advancing the cause of refugees provoked in groups of people who, after deciding that they answer to a “higher” law, have trouble justifying themselves to one another. Nevertheless, although García provides insight into why activists do what they do, she has little to say about the decisions politicians make and why they make them. That is, although readers might well know the underpinnings of Carter’s application of human rights or the importance of anticommunism to Reagan’s support of the Nicaraguan Contras, it is problematic to assume such familiarity in the cases of Mexican and Canadian politics.

Insofar as four presidents, all *priístas*, shaped Mexico’s refugee policies, one might assume that there was not much to distinguish the approach of José López Portillo from those of his successors, Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and Ernesto Zedillo. But, in fact, there were important differences and it would be useful to explain them. Similarly, García’s chapter on refugees in Canada moves rapidly through a series of prime ministers—Pierre Trudeau, Joe Clark, John Turner, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien—with no mention of their political affiliations. As a result of this silence, one would never know that Canada has a multiparty system. Yet it does, with a Liberal Party highly supportive of family unification and multiculturalism and a Conservative Party historically viewed as unsympathetic to immigrants and refugees. Moreover, small parties such as the center-left New Democrats and Bloc Québécois have exercised disproportionate influence in parliamentary debates on social issues, notably the settlement of refugees.

If Canadian politics and politicians get short shrift in this discussion, grassroots activism for human rights receives very detailed, insightful, and appreciative consideration, as in the chapters on Mexico and the United States. Despite this imbalance—which leaves one to ask why activists have success in some epochs and not in others—García captures a fundamental truth by juxtaposing the three country studies. As this reviewer (who holds both Canadian and U.S. citizenship) can attest, Canadians are always in danger of slipping into complacency and self-congratulation when foreign policy is framed as a straight comparison

between the United States and Canada. This is obvious, above all, with respect to the role of each country in peacekeeping, the receipt of refugees, and human rights. Yet García shows that, in reality, there is a profound difference between the United States and its two neighbors, insofar as U.S. foreign policy creates refugees, on whose behalf activists must work to provide asylum. In contrast, neither Mexico nor Canada played a role in precipitating the humanitarian crisis in Central America. Furthermore, in both nations, the receipt and accommodation of displaced and persecuted people is regarded as a normal, if regrettable, state of affairs.

Here, then, are four valuable contributions to our understanding of migration in its various forms: permanent, cyclical, temporary, and forced. To move beyond the common wisdom on these topics, the authors of these works employ an array of research tools, including ethnography, formal surveys, open-ended interviews, and the analysis of both media accounts and historical documents. All four works are rigorous in their approach to a central issue of our time. Happily, their authors also share a commitment to the human rights of the people they study and a readiness to use social science to promote social justice for the millions who migrate in the Americas.