



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

---

## **Making Sense of Latin American Immigrant Experiences in the United States**

Gail Mummert

Latin American Research Review, Volume 45, Number 1, 2010,  
pp. 244-255 (Review)

Published by Latin American Studies Association  
DOI: 10.1353/lar.0.0085



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/lar/summary/v045/45.1.mummert.html>

# MAKING SENSE OF LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES

*Gail Mummert*  
*El Colegio de Michoacán*

**Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform.** By Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis. New York: New York University Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 308. \$22.00 paper.

**La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City.** By Jason Pribilsky. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007. Pp. xxi + 336. \$49.95 cloth.

**Citizenship across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante.** By Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. Pp. xii + 249. \$19.95 paper.

**Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon.** By Lynn Stephen. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. xxii + 375. \$23.95 paper.

**The Farmworkers' Journey.** By Ann Aurelia López. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Pp. xxiii + 337. \$21.95 paper.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, scholarship on Latin American immigrants to the United States focused largely on their working lives, depicting these immigrants as a necessary albeit exploited labor force. Since then, along with implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the expansion of global capitalism in the twenty-first century, there has been growing recognition in academic and policy-making circles of the ever-greater movement of labor, capital, goods, information, and ideas across international boundaries. These flows should be understood in a post-9/11 political climate, which tends to justify anti-immigrant sentiment and antiterrorist policies. In response, migration scholars have searched for new paradigms to make sense of the experiences of today's immigrants in the United States and to understand these immigrants not only as laborers in an underclass. The goal is to grasp the wider panorama of their lives betwixt and between, both here and there.

This review examines five recent additions to a growing body of scholarship informed by theoretical gazes “from below” on transnational processes and by a methodological shift toward qualitative research and the use of personal narratives. The authors are scholar-activists overtly committed to bringing to public attention the everyday lives and struggles of immigrants from Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and other points south of the United States. All five books draw heavily on long-term, multisited ethnographies by researchers who spent from seven to ten years eliciting stories from migrants bound northward. Their stories deal with the (often dangerous) decisions taken and their causes; they chart the dreams and struggles of immigrants to overcome poverty, to survive with a dose of dignity, and hopefully to carve out a better life for their children. In a very real sense, the ethnographer-authors—almost all working in California and the Pacific Northwest, where many immigrants have formed ethnic enclaves—become their subjects’ storytellers. They do so compelled by the hope of improving the lives of their interviewees by informing public opinion and ultimately immigration, trade, and welfare policy in North America.

The works reviewed here do not, however, simply give voice to the often invisible and downtrodden immigrant who made the trek to El Norte catapulted by the heavy toll of neoliberal economic restructuring on poor and working-class families in the cities and countrysides of Latin America. Rather, in a methodological departure from prevailing scholarship that too often treats research subjects as passive informants, these authors all foreground their collaboration with immigrants as individuals and groups increasingly organized to move forward collectively. It is thus fitting that two books (Marchevsky and Theoharis; Smith and Bakker) are also collaborative in authorship. All five works discuss at length their theoretical and methodological points of departure, study design, the ethics of their research, and their engagement with social justice for Latin American immigrants to the United States. In a nutshell, readers are briefed as to the authors’ trajectories and biases, and learn how the contradictory nature of the everyday lives of immigrants has guided the analytical gaze from below of research on transnationalism. Smith and Bakker explicitly develop what they dub “transnational ethnography” in the search to “make sense of the power relations and meaning-making practices of [their] ethnographic subjects” (216–217). Stephen also espouses and conducts “collaborative activist ethnographic research,” eschewing the cataloging found in “applied anthropology” as not analytically rigorous (325). Marchevsky and Theoharis take this methodological commitment a step further by carrying out “a different kind of ethnography—one that joined political economy, history, analysis of representation, and critique of social science research with rich detail about people’s lives. It also had to provide ample space for Latinas to theorize their own experiences and the larger society around them” (21).

Because transnational and transborder perspectives take the fore in most of these studies, they deal not only with immigrants themselves but also with family members who stay behind, who eventually join them in the United States, or who move back and forth. Relying heavily on personal narratives and repeated interviews, these studies also illustrate how immigrants cross borders in more than a physical sense; they continually cross gendered, racial, ethnic, political, cultural, and class borders as well. The chapters of Stephen's *Transborder Lives* are indeed built around this metaphor of different crossings, allowing hybrid, multiple, and shifting identities to come to the fore, particularly in discussing how new forms of citizenship are crafted.

López alone, among the five authors, uses a binational framework to study what she calls "the farmworkers' journey." In fourteen short and very readable chapters that move north and then south, she seeks to inform the general public of the plight of farmworker families who leave impoverished regions in west-central Mexico for California. López argues her case passionately, indeed calling for participation in the projects of the Farmworker Family Foundation that she herself created. The dehumanization of migrant men, women, and children, as well as the environmental degradation of the Mexican countryside that she describes, are certainly real and appalling. However, Lopez romanticizes a rural campesino culture that was supposedly ecologically sound before the green revolution, NAFTA, and the voracious appetite of corporate capitalism. With anecdotal evidence gleaned from region to region and from field to kitchen table, her vignettes of farmworker families tend to be so brief and disengaged from life trajectories as a whole that they have value only as grist to her mill: to denounce the exploitation of an expendable immigrant workforce by California's corporate agribusiness, whose power is partially reproduced south of the border.

Lopez peppers her book with oversimplifications—most notably a pre-NAFTA/post-NAFTA watershed explaining all of Mexico's woes—and flimsy evidence that detracts from the validity of the overall argument. The chapter "Institutional Oppression in the West-Central Mexico Countryside" is a case in point: complex phenomena such as machismo, the Catholic Church's promotion of family values, and the increased military presence because of the war on drug trafficking are each summarily dealt with in a few pages. Distortions and exaggerations like the following can be found throughout the book: "any two-year-old can purchase colorful liter containers of deadly agrochemicals in the west-central Mexico countryside" (218), and "abandoned and depressed women are a norm in the countryside" (xviii). In short, López champions justice for Mexican farmworker families by means of a polemic that may educate a general readership but that informed academics will find lacking rigor.

In contrast, the other four studies under review successfully walk a tightrope between celebration and doom. They provide a sense of the variegated population of Latin American immigrants to the United States, addressing documented (resident alien or naturalized citizen) and undocumented immigrants (from stereotypical farmworkers to more recent service-sector laborers), their social networks, and their organizations (both formal and informal). Pribilsky's *La Chulla Vida* focuses on undocumented Ecuadorean men who, having left their young families behind high in the Andes, toil in restaurant kitchens or in sweatshops in New York City. In *Not Working*, Marchevsky and Theoharis portray poor Mexican-immigrant mothers who often head households in the "global suburb" of Long Beach, California, and find themselves trapped in the throes of the 1996 welfare reforms. Stephen traces what she calls the transborder lives of indigenous Oaxacans who shuttle between Mexico, California, and Oregon. Smith and Bakker themselves straddled the United States–Mexico border in *Citizenship across Borders*, presenting five extended case studies of actors linked to the states of Guanajuato and Zacatecas who engage in transnational political activity. What these heterogeneous and mobile study populations share are lives marked by poverty, disenfranchisement, and vulnerability. Increasingly, however, they have come to understand—despite rhetoric to the contrary—that their plight is not primarily due to individual shortcomings but instead to deepening racism and xenophobia, and to globalization and neoliberal economic processes beyond their control. Marchevsky and Theoharis aptly refer to their interviewees' sense of marginalization and their positioning in multiple localities: "Most struggled to convey the schizophrenic experience of living in a country that welcomes and profits from the labor of Latino immigrants, yet continually treats them as racial threats and undeserving interlopers within the national community" (7).

Taken collectively, these volumes present evidence to debunk the myth of a closed door to immigrants, arguing like Stephen that "U.S. immigration policy toward Mexico has, in fact, encouraged and facilitated increased immigration" (145). In other words, a surprising but undeniable fact emerges from these readings: the U.S. government has historically been a recruiter of cheap, disenfranchised labor from Latin America—people whose human rights are easily disregarded, whose costs of reproduction are shouldered across borders. In Stephen's deft reconstruction, the systematic creation of a mobile, flexible labor force comprised of Mexican immigrants willing to accept low-wage employment had its beginnings in the *bracero* program of 1942–1964. Marchevsky and Theoharis also stress that the U.S. government has long maintained this reliable labor force through its public welfare policy. Drawing on Michel Foucault, they pinpoint "technologies of surveillance" and so-called correctives to

the immigrant poor, seeking by this means to “transform the ‘question of governance’ into one of self-governance” (118). Their Latina interlocutors tellingly express feelings of being constantly relegated and criticized as workers, mothers, and citizens. In general, the immigrants studied in this handful of works report a strong sense of being objects of observation simply because of perceptions of them as different from the dominant majority.

Each of the books under review attempts to understand the ties that simultaneously bind immigrants to multiple localities within larger historical, political, social, and economic contexts. That is, they delve into and vividly portray the constraints as well as the opportunities inherent in transnational lives, and the recasting of space and place that border crossers experience in their own bodies as they confront two or more nation-states.

What, therefore, can we glean from these works about the transnational lives and practices of Latin American immigrants to the United States? Four interlocking themes emerge, albeit with varying depth and theoretical sophistication: (1) the pervasiveness of gendered, ethnic, and racial hierarchies in everyday life across borders; (2) the dialectics of transnational political organizing and gendered/ethnic identity construction; (3) the growing engagement of immigrants with two or more nation-states so as to forge novel notions of citizenship and rights; and (4) the fact that families and gender relations are remade through migration.

#### THE PERVASIVENESS OF GENDERED, ETHNIC, AND RACIAL HIERARCHIES

It is indeed an expected leitmotif of these books that immigrants to the United States are today situated in gendered, racial, and ethnic hierarchies, and accordingly face quotidian acts of discrimination and injustice. More important, these books also speak to immigrants’ attempts to resituate themselves—both discursively and in practice—in these hierarchies by engaging in inclusionary or exclusionary battles over identity. Stephen develops this issue comprehensively in looking at how Mixtec and Zapotec Indians negotiate long-standing and complex migratory circuits in which they invariably occupy the lowest niches. Pribilsky instead limits discussion of racial and ethnic hierarchies to a few pages in a contextual chapter that posits an intermediary—not indigenous, mestizo, or white—*cholo* ethnicity for rural Andean highlanders in the Azuayo-Cañari region of southern Ecuador. He shows that in these migrants’ dreams of achieving modernity, it is essential to leave behind the trappings of a folkloric, ethnic past, most notably forms of dress and speech. Yet his explanation of the book’s title underlines how certain Quechua words have entered the local register of Spanish that these migrants speak. The polysemic translation of the oft-repeated aphorism “la chulla vida” as “that is how life

is," "you have only one life to live," or "there is only one life to leave" is further complicated by the connotation of "not simply something missing, but also something profoundly out of balance" (xiii-xiv). One, then, wonders whether Pribilsky has not somewhat underestimated the importance of ethnicity for migrant men and their families as they "compose lives based simultaneously in tradition and change" (274).

From a very different and novel angle, Marchevsky and Theoharis seek to debunk deeply entrenched myths about poor, brown women, men, and families by attacking head-on the racialization of Mexican immigrants receiving welfare. Their repeat interviews and home visits with single Mexican mothers in Long Beach (long-term permanent residents with U.S.-born children) in fact reveal that welfare support was difficult to obtain, even harder to keep, and insufficient to support a family. In searingly truthful statements, the authors turn on its head the myth of promiscuous welfare queens enjoying a free ride from hardworking citizens: "Work had been ever present in their lives but had never been a means for material security or individual fulfillment" (144).

This trenchant criticism of the welfare-to-work reform package with its slogan "any job [at any wage] is a good job" focuses attention on class-based power relations that are all too evident to the working poor as they navigate through welfare offices, low-wage workplaces, and training programs ostensibly designed to get them off the dole and into jobs. This groundbreaking study asks difficult questions about poverty and its causes, pointing out that the discourse of cultural pathology and dependency has become ingrained in the United States since the civil rights era. Identifying their research as an outgrowth of Marchevsky's participation in evaluating welfare reform in four metropolitan counties across the United States, she and Theoharis lambaste applied welfare policy research for perpetuating the idea that the poor are personally responsible for their poverty. They thus attack the conventional conclusion that the solution to "the problem" is behavioral rather than a matter of social justice and entitlement.

The ties between gendered, ethnic, and racial hierarchies and labor-market segmentation for immigrants in the United States have been amply studied. In this vein, these books reiterate that undocumented status and racism channel Latin American men into employment as farmworkers, gardeners, cooks, construction workers, and restaurant staff. Brown-skinned females without papers tend instead to fill a niche in caring and cleaning, while a minority do field work. Moving beyond this traditional focus, these works also explore the interlocking of gender, race, and ethnicity in other areas. For example, Stephen shows that, over the course of the past several decades, this gendered and racial labor market segmentation has led to the "Latinoization" of many parts of the rural United States (145). Woodburn, Oregon—headquarters of the agricultural labor

union that Stephen studies—is a fountainhead of what she calls “Mexican Oregon,” a term that follows on the footsteps of Robert Courtney Smith’s *Mexican New York* (2006) and Nicholas De Genova’s *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (2005). Readers can thus appreciate how space and place are constantly reconstructed in the experiences of migrants living in discontinuous communities, a transformation closely linked to the reshaping of identities, to which we now turn.

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZING AND ETHNIC/GENDERED IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Latin American (particularly Mexican) immigrants have learned—notably in the past three decades—that political organizing is key to economic survival and upward social mobility. This is especially true amid the most recent wave of nativist politics and economic woes in the United States. Smith and Bakker zero in on this trend by tracing how political organizations for migrants have emerged transnationally. They first show how hometown associations evolved into state-level federations that have succeeded in pressuring the Mexican government (both at the federal level and in particular states) to enact laws and policies that politically reincorporate Mexicans residing outside the nation. From the outset, what the authors aptly term “transnational political engagement” (vii) blossomed into a wide range of activities: lobbying, electoral campaigning, fighting for rights through legislative channels, and creating and sustaining social movements. In clearly stated queries and a carefully constructed argument, Smith and Bakker illustrate how immigrants engage in translocal politics, pursuing interests in Mexico and the United States. Ultimately, a growing number become dual citizens and trace new paths to make their voices heard and their votes counted. Considering words, deeds, policy, and practice, Smith and Bakker juxtapose campaign promises and interview statements to actual behavior and actions. They discuss the apparent contradictions between these various elements in chapters on plans for transnational community development and the fight for absentee-voting rights. Their analysis is less incisive when they discuss attempts by the Guanajuato state government to recast the migrant family.

In a similar vein, Stephen devotes several chapters to the grassroots and transborder organizing of four indigenous organizations, highlighting struggles in which politics, rights, and pan-indigenous citizenships are inextricably interwoven. Her most developed example documents how a labor union uniting farmworkers and tree planters in the Pacific Northwest gained members by providing assistance in filings for amnesty status in the 1980s, went on to negotiate improved labor conditions in the 1990s, and continues to rally for rights in the face of anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation in the early twenty-first century. With a long-standing interest in gender, Stephen also explores how a spin-off of the



male-dominated labor union, *Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas*, created an income-generating project promoted exclusively by and for farm-worker women. In an innovative final chapter, she traces the impact of the digital era on ethnic identity construction: the use of e-mail and Web pages has revolutionized cross-border communications and organizing, facilitating “simultaneous presence in multiple sites” (236). This theme—and the ever-widening generational gap that it fuels—is emerging as a vital area of study for the social sciences today.

In the extended case studies that Smith and Bakker present, this reader would have liked more attention to the rank and file of politically engaged migrants. Their analysis centers on key players (all meticulously presented in a useful *dramatis personae* in the appendix), mostly male leaders and politicians who have gone from rags to riches and therefore embody the ideal of a successful migrant who through sacrifice achieves a brighter future for his family. Although the authors recognize this bias, one cannot help wondering how the membership of the networks led by these figures practices transnational citizenship. For example, does it avail itself of digital communications? Another welcome addition to Smith and Bakker’s volume would have been a more incisive analysis of gendered stereotypes that glorify the male migrant and underestimate how females also shape and are shaped by migration. Such stereotypes pervade governmental program brochures and leaders’ discourse, and they are materialized in statues of heroic male migrants pictured in the book. It is itself a product of gender hierarchies and ideologies that the only female leader interviewed and quoted at length was simply an onlooker to her grandparents’ activism as a girl in her hometown village of Las Animas, Zacatecas, and then “learned her politics” when she immigrated to East Los Angeles as an eleven-year-old (177–181).

An interesting but underdeveloped point in these books is that support for such immigrant political organizing comes from myriad and sometimes unlikely bedfellows: Latino organizations in the United States, Mexican government offices (consulates, federal ministries), the Catholic Church, citizen groups, and—last but not least—the authors who position themselves as researcher-activists.

#### FACING TWO NATIONS AND MULTIPLE NOTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

Collectively, the books under review grapple with innovative concepts that intend to capture the ways in which immigrants attempt to claim and exercise civil, political, and human rights in multiple locales. *Marchevsky* and *Theoharis* deal squarely with debates about citizenship and nation-building in the face of globalization and carefully delineate the interaction of female immigrants with a range of agencies beyond immigration control and enforcement. Stephen as well as Smith and Bakker go further:

they analyze what cultural and transnational citizenship actually mean to governments, immigrants, and citizens. Drawing on an intellectual tradition stemming from the definitions of “cultural citizenship” by Renato Rosaldo in the late 1980s and of “flexible citizenship” by Aihwa Ong in the late 1990s, these authors consider how immigrants orchestrate their lives across borders in contradictory relationships with two or more nation-states and with two or more bodies politic.<sup>1</sup>

By focusing on *el migrante’s* actual practice of citizenship across borders, Smith and Bakker’s stance is more balanced than that found in globalization literature—from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) onward—which forecasts a decline in the significance of nation-based citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Along with Marchevsky and Theoharis, as well as Stephen, they instead argue for the nation-state’s renewed importance by showing how immigrants are both within and beyond its grasp. Through richly detailed case studies, all three books by these authors show that demands for respect of labor, human, indigenous, and immigrant rights are enacted on an uneven playing field. They make clear that, although immigrant claims do not always result in legal entitlements, they nevertheless forge gendered, ethnic, and political identities in the process. Ironically, Mexican immigrants may experience their Mexican citizenship while residing in the United States or even when applying for naturalization as citizens of the United States, their second country.

Smith and Bakker explore at length the practice of dual citizenship in the context of civic engagement, elections, and the opening of new political spaces that span both sides of the border. Stephen, in contrast, views transnational migration “as a subset of the transborder experience” (23). Having for more than two decades traced the lives of indigenous Oaxacans, conceptualizing their lives as an unending series of border crossings that are not only national but also ethnic, cultural, regional, and gendered, she accordingly prefers the term *transborder* to *transnational*. She finds cultural citizenship useful for understanding the path toward expanding rights in the more formal arena of transborder citizenship, and she argues that citizenship practices are inseparable from social constructions of ethnicity.

Contrary to classic citizenship theory, the notions of flexible, cultural, transnational, and transborder citizenship have in common the recognition that the state is no longer the only entity to confer citizenship, act-

1. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). See also George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), chap. 1.

2. Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

ing moreover in a top-down fashion. Rather, an array of political subjects wage battles over different kinds of citizenship.

#### REMAKING GENDER RELATIONS AND FAMILY LIFE

The five works under review also portray how gender relations and family life are remade in migratory contexts. This focus—in which processes and institutions take the limelight—stems from a shift that occurred in migration research roughly at the end of the 1980s from individuals to collectivities (e.g., families, labor unions, hometown and community organizations) as units of description and analysis. Paying attention to gendered domestic relationships, the authors explore the changing meanings of sexuality, courtship, marriage, cohabitation, and family, and the many tensions involved in long-term separations and long-distance resource management and decision making. Their main focus is on relationships between parents (particularly mothers) and children, although Stephen and López briefly mention coparenting and caregiving by stand-in relatives. Personal narratives illustrate the economic and emotional instability of wives left behind, particularly when they face the specter of their migrant husbands abandoning them. Out of necessity, male migrants learn to perform domestic chores that would be considered strictly woman's work back home. For low-wage earners, family survival in the United States depends on two incomes; therefore, female migrants swiftly seek employment and learn to manage child care by working opposite shifts from their husbands or by relying on female relatives.

The crucial issue of different legal statuses of members of the same household is briefly alluded to by Stephen (241), López (154), and Marchevsky and Theoharis (230). This situation forces many immigrant families to balance the entitlements of government aid programs against the risks to the undocumented who claim them. Typically, the father has acquired legal status, the mother is undocumented, and the children are labeled in various ways: as undocumented or resident aliens or as citizens. Changes to immigration policy and to demands for immigrant labor have led to a growth in so-called mixed-status households, a phenomenon whose multiple consequences require much more research. Conspicuously absent from these books, probably because of the focus on young families, are the experiences of the elderly and the related issues of caregiving, health services, and retirement in the transnational context.

From a refreshing perspective, Pribilsky looks at young male migrants to New York City from a little-studied Andean region, offering a glimpse of how they attempt to achieve manhood through the travails of "*IONY Life*," a playful Spanglish rendering of the "I Love New York" ad featuring a red heart. As his book's subtitle suggests, this ethnography explores

the intersection of migration, gender, and family in Queens and in the Azuayo-Cañari highlands of Ecuador, whose worst economic crisis in a century has fueled "one of the most significant migrant streams linking the North and South American continents" (7).

Looking at local and regional processes, Pribilsky astutely weaves together agricultural decline, dollarization, and the development of a remittance economy to argue that the transition from teenager to young man of his subjects no longer occurs in Andean cornfields but in dead-end jobs in restaurants or as day laborers in construction. These migrants leave home in search of meaning, struggling to be modern and to offer modern lives to the families they leave behind. In this, they enter an intricate web of contradictory experiences: the coveted trappings of modernity seem to lie just outside their reach as they work long hours at low-paying jobs to remit a few hundred dollars a month back home. New forms of wealth have transformed livelihood in the Andes and the expectations that couples have for themselves and their children. Bringing gender to the fore, Pribilsky shows why an ethnography of men and masculine roles should also include interviews with women about their roles. As one of few authors to demonstrate that male migrants can be catalysts of change in gender relations, he effectively argues that the boundaries between virile and effeminate work play out in the division between front-room and back-room restaurant jobs and in sewing tasks performed for Korean employers.

In conclusion, the five works under review enhance our understanding of the implications of ethnographic work and of the myriad contradictions of living as migrants in the interstices of nation-states, simultaneously here and there, needed and rejected. Although primarily focused on Mexican immigrants (not surprising given Mexico's proximity to the United States and its preponderance in migratory streams), these works suggest avenues for comparative analysis with other areas in the Americas and elsewhere. They invite research on topics such as the experience of children in migration, mixed-status families, and the future of grassroots organizing, and they raise fundamental questions like that which Pribilsky poses in regard to Ecuador: do transnational families unwittingly "groom children to become future migrants"? (277). In the face of formidable obstacles, one may also ask whether migrants reshape their lives as they had envisioned.

Finally, what do these authors foresee? First, that there will be no end to migration fueled by shrinking employment opportunities south of the U.S. border and continuing demand for cheap labor in cities, suburbs, and rural backwaters. Migration does not necessarily respond rapidly to economic upturns and downturns, because, as Smith and Bakker point out, it "has deep cultural as well as economic roots" (207). Second, the authors predict that grassroots struggles for citizenship and entitlements will continue to play out on transnational and transborder stages, and along the

fault lines of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, and that new political arenas will emerge. They agree that the political aim of limiting illegal immigration from Latin America obfuscates the U.S. government's role in maintaining a steady flow of cheap labor and turns a blind eye to increasing transnational connections among families, regions, and nation-states. In this sense, the books under review will be of great interest to scholars dealing with the implications of neoliberal economic and political restructuring in Latin America and their impact particularly on the hardest hit: subsistence and small-scale farmers. These books should be read for the light they shed on how immigrants negotiate poverty, uncertainty, and limited options while struggling to find their place in the early-twenty-first century world.