Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews
http://csx.sagepub.com/

Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity

Ernesto Castañeda

Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews 2011 40: 53
DOI: 10.1177/0094306110391764z

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://csx.sagepub.com/content/40/1/53

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
ASA
AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
American Sociological Association

panethnicity becomes institutional panethnicity (p. 169). These processes can be genuinely empowering to the local Latino community (p. 171). ''Becoming American means becoming Latino'' (p. 189). The author emphasizes that taking on the Latino label does not represent a failure to assimilate, but rather, a new model of integration that recognizes difference.

While he readily admits to the shortcomings of his investigation—the sample is not random, case studies do not offer enough information from which to make substantial generalizations, second-generation Dominicans are often still too young to offer definitive data, urban migrations change the possible conclusions of that data—he nonetheless tells a compelling, well researched, and deeply sensitive story. This story details the complex experiences of Dominicans, underscoring the community's ''Americanness.'' In such a light, this book does more than speak about a specific group in the United States, but also quite convincingly informs us of what the particular process of immigrant incorporation of that specific group actually tells us about U.S. cultural practices. Itzigsohn insists:

> ''It is worth repeating that from the perspective of the stratified ethnoracial incorporation approach proposed here the construction of these identities does not indicate a failure to assimilate. These are the forms of identity that Dominicans use to carve a place for themselves in American society and the way in which they mobilize to make claims on the American political system'' (p. 17).

As he reviews previous theories of migration to large gateway cities in the United States, he destabilizes many presently held-on-to myths of urban migration. Dominicans offer a succinct example of new migration and integration patterns, as they are no longer limited by massive relocation to New York City. In fact, as Itzigsohn points out, Dominicans account for one of the largest immigrant ethnic groups in a smaller place such as Providence (p. 4). They have choices and are ''on the move,'' with many re-establishing themselves in other states that include North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Florida (p. 38).

This book tells an important story of a phase of immigration in Providence, Rhode Island, which merits a solid place alongside other studies of previous migrations such as that of the Irish, Italians, Eastern Europeans, French Canadians, Portuguese, and Cape Verdeans, and amidst the ever-growing section of Latino Studies.

Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity, by **Tomás R. Jiménez.** Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. 347pp. $21.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520261426.

Ernesto Castañeda
University of Texas, El Paso
ecastaneda10@utep.edu

Given the nativist attacks against ''illegal'' immigrants in recent decades and Samuel Huntington's writings about the ''Hispanic challenge,'' it has become commonplace to talk about the exceptionalism of Mexican immigrants and their supposed aversion to integrate into American culture. Tomás Jiménez set out to test some of these hypotheses by looking at older generations of Mexican Americans, with the main questions being: how different are Mexican immigrants from other historical immigrant groups, and how does the almost continuous migration from Mexico affect the ethnic identity of previous generations of Mexican Americans?

This book is a valuable addition to the literature on immigration, integration and ethnicity. Nuanced views on Mexicans in the United States, and rich empirical material drawn from in-depth interviews and participant observation, test preconceived notions about Mexicans' inability to integrate into American society. The book looks at Mexican Americans in two small cities, Santa Maria, California (66.8 percent Hispanic in 2008, according to the Census Bureau) and Garden City, Kansas (44.7 percent Hispanic). The former has experienced continuous immigration and the latter had a long immigration hiatus. The book sets out in part to correct American

assimilation theories which, as Jiménez states, are based mainly on European experiences. He states that these theories neglect the over one hundred years of Mexican migration and settlement. He thus compares the literature on "white-ethnics" with the experiences of Mexican Americans (second generation and above).

European migration to America has greatly decreased in numbers, thereby cutting ethnic whites from their forebearers' cultures, slowly rendering their ethnic identities optional and symbolic, according to Jiménez, as in the case of Irish Americans or Italian Americans who may only retain an ethnic last name and participate in a few yearly ethnic celebrations. This book argues that Mexican Americans may have had a harder time than previous groups in being recognized as fully American because of continued immigration and cultural replenishment. New waves of Mexican migration open the door for some Mexican Americans to reactivate some cultural practices like the use of Spanish, sporadic consumption of Mexican food, and increased exposure to Mexican music. Because of this continuous immigration, Mexican Americans are often expected to engage in the same cultural practices associated with Mexican ethnicity by newcomers and by non-Mexicans. This leads to a number of misunderstandings and impossible pressures for Mexican Americans, who in multicultural environments may need to be "authentic" and at other times they have to appear all-American. Thus Mexican-Americans have to be more "Mexican" than Mexicans and more "American" than Americans.

A challenge arises when trying to define "American Culture" and "Mexican Culture." Despite the immigrants' own nationalistic claims, in practice "Mexican culture" deeply varies by region and social class. Jiménez mentions in passing that contemporary immigrants enter a very different United States than previous immigrants: a United States changed by the civil rights and multicultural movements. Yet Jiménez does not venture into what "ethnic replenishment" really means in a context where salsa, burritos, avocado, tortillas and chilies have become such a part of the American mainstream as other "ethnic foods": pizza, pasta, sushi, and apple pie.

A crucial oversight regarding the experiences of Italian, Polish, Jewish, Irish and twentieth century Mexican migrants is the low national allegiance of white-ethnics, who emigrated from then weaker nation-states and less homogeneous national cultural and imagined communities, who had stronger local identities and only became, for example, "Italian" once in the United States. Contrary to this, Mexican immigrants arrived with an increasingly developed national identity—a project in which the Mexican government and educational system has been deeply invested since the Revolution of 1910. But despite this important historical difference, immigrant integration for both groups takes time and should be measured in terms of generations and cohorts, to take into account historical circumstances as Jiménez rightly does, rather than by the pure existence of ethnic enclaves where languages other than English are spoken.

The book includes a chapter on Mexican Americans' views on present Mexican immigration, but the views that new migrants have of Mexican Americans was considered outside the scope of the study and not reported. This would have shown the importance that newcomers have in replenishing the culture of the descendants of previous waves of Mexican immigrants, as reported by interactions with Mexican Americans which are less than symmetric in terms of power than is often presented in the book. Jiménez found a portion of Mexican Americans who oppose new immigration because of the negative image that it brings to them; another group (particularly in Santa Maria) relates the experiences of newcomers to those of their forebearers and sees a benefit in the continued Mexican and Latino immigration, since it creates jobs that require certain knowledge of both English and Spanish. Interestingly, those in favor of opening the door to newcomers do so not based on "ethnic nationalism" but on American ideals of opportunity, individual effort and merit. Indeed, most people in the sample are not members of ethnic organizations.

Some of the best evidence for ethnic replenishment comes from data on friendships, dating and marriages between older generation and recent Mexican immigrants. Jiménez successfully shows the making and blurring of

social boundaries between and within Mexicans and Americans. Some Mexican Americans ease boundaries by translating for immigrants in public places, and by speaking against nativist comments by non-Mexicans. But others prefer to avoid contact with recent arrivals.

Jiménez could have been better served by using the concept of "dissimilarity" that he coined in an article with David Fitzgerald to describe how first generation Mexicans lose some of their similarity with Mexicans after years of acculturation in the United States. From his rich interview data, the majority of Mexican Americans appear highly culturally and structurally integrated into American society; yet his emphasis on ethnic replenishment due to the availability of "ethnic raw materials" may lead some readers to the opposite (if not wrong) conclusion. He downplays the role of race, colonialism, and geographical concentration and he underlines continuous replenishment—an interesting and worthy object of sociological study—but the argument is overstated in a way that could give fodder to opponents of Mexican migration.

Jiménez argues that Mexican Americans should not be considered "an aggrieved" minority since many (if not all) late generation Americans of Mexican descent are fully integrated into American society in terms of English mastery, employment, residential mobility, education, and intermarriage. At the same time Jiménez accepts that often Mexican-origin Americans are treated as "other" no matter how culturally assimilated they may be. As with Asian Americans, Mexican Americans who look "foreign" may be asked where they are from, no matter how long someone's family has been in the United States. Thus Jiménez states that "the Mexican-origin population is more like a permanent immigrant group" (p. 259). Jiménez attributes this to continuous immigration from Mexico and says that the reason this does not happen anymore with Irish Americans or Italian Americans is because immigration from those countries stopped. It surely declined but Europeans continue to emigrate to the United States. The graph on page seven shows how there are as many new Polish or Irish immigrants today as there were Mexicans in the early 1900s. So, even if on a different scale, one could make the same argument about immigrant replenishment with continued Irish immigration and the persistence of Irish bars and the celebration of St. Patrick's Day. *Replenished Ethnicity* is a refreshing book, and one cannot wait to read Jiménez' future research building on this noteworthy work.

At the Altar of the Bottom Line: The Degradation of Work in the 21st Century, by **Tom Juravich.** Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009. 236pp. $26.95 paper. ISBN: 9781558497252.

Mark Thomas
York University, Toronto, Canada
mpthomas@yorku.ca

By the early 1990s, economists, policymakers and business commentators were writing about the emergence of a so-called "new economy," where post-industrial workplaces would create jobs that were creative and rewarding, organized through cooperative work teams, and that gave people high degrees of control over their work. Within this post-industrial landscape, work in the twenty-first century would be more productive, less physically demanding, and less alienating than the earlier industrial era. The myths of this "new economy" first began to unravel with the dot-com bust at the end of the 1990s. The crisis in financial markets that began in 2008 further signaled that something was desperately wrong with neoliberal capitalism, as unemployment soared and growing economic insecurity became front-page news on a daily basis. Throughout this period, precarious jobs were also growing at a rapid pace, producing highly polarized labor markets in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Tom Juravich's workplace ethnography titled *At the Altar of the Bottom Line: The Degradation of Work in the 21st Century* investigates people's work experiences in this context of crisis. Based on 85 interviews conducted over an eight-year period, Juravich takes readers into four very different work settings: a Verizon call center, a fish-processing plant, a Boston medical center, and a manufacturer of machinery for the paper industry. Juravich's ethnographic research