

# MEXICAN MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

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**TOMÁS R. JIMÉNEZ**, *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009, 366 pages, ISBN 978-0520261426. Paper, \$21.95.

**JOANNA DREBY**, *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and their Children*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010, 336 pages, ISBN 978-0520260900. Paper, \$21.95.

Literature on international migration, assimilation, and transnationalism continues to be concerned with questions about ties that migrants and their descendents have with their homelands, coethnics, and the native-born population. Tomás R. Jiménez's *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity* and Joanna Dreby's *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and their Children* provide important perspectives on different aspects of the larger phenomenon of international migration from Mexico to the United States that is a consequence of labor demand in the United States, economic need and job scarcity in Mexico, and a global economy. Both books deal with social life that takes place across ethnic boundaries, within ethnic groups, and across national borders. Taking qualitative approaches and dealing with the perennial tension between inclusion and exclusion, these books analyze the experiences and perspectives of Mexican migrants, Mexican children, and Mexican Americans.

Jiménez's book considers questions of later-generation Mexican Americans' ethnic identity and ethnic boundaries between them, newer Mexican immigrant arrivals, and the non-Mexican U.S. population. Dreby's work concentrates on workers who migrate from Mexico and leave children behind and how this affects family structure, individuals within these families, and gender roles. In what follows, I will review each book independently and close with concluding remarks that show how *Replenished Ethnicity* and *Divided by Borders* offer complementary analyses of the common themes of international migration, settlement, and adjustment.

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Jiménez's theoretically and empirically rich *Replenished Ethnicity* tackles the question of "What has become of later-generation descendants of early [pre-1940] Mexican immigrants?" (p. 3). To answer this question, Jiménez leverages data from interviews and ethnography conducted in Santa Maria, California—a community that experienced continued immigration—and Garden City, Kansas which saw interrupted immigration. He argues that "immigrant replenishment"—ongoing Mexican immigration—is a variable that assimilation scholars have under-appreciated. This theoretical intervention allows for comparisons with European immigrants who arrived at the turn of the twentieth century but whose immigration ceased around 1920. This break allowed European immigrants to incorporate into U.S. society and enact an ethnicity that was inconsequential except for how they wished to voluntarily and symbolically engage it. By contrast, Jiménez contends that "immigrant replenishment" shapes Mexican American ethnic identity in ways that are both positive, providing ethnic raw materials that allow for a meaningful ethnic identity, and negative, in that immigration heightens nativism and the tendency to racialize the Mexican-origin population, regardless of nation of birth (pp. 22–23).

A core argument of *Replenished Ethnicity* is that population demographics are significant to assimilation possibilities. Referring to the comparison between Mexican and European immigrants, Jiménez writes: "the large coethnic immigrant population restocks the access that Mexican-Americans have to the 'ethnic stuff' that ethnicity contains, making the Mexican-American experience radically different from that of white ethnics" (p. 69). Due to this "restocking" of Mexican immigrants who become neighbors, friends, marriage partners and who supply "ethnic stuff" (such as the Spanish language, cuisine, and ethnic products), ethnicity does not fade the way it did for those groups whose immigration waves stopped. Stated slightly differently but still underscoring the importance of population demographics and social context: "the continual influx of Mexican immigrants provides an extrafamilial context that is 'thick' with Mexican ethnicity, preventing the recession of ethnicity into a purely symbolic form" (p. 87). One question that remains, however, is if any later generation Mexican Americans do in fact experience a symbolic ethnicity and, if so, whom? Given the book's focus on those who are exclusively of Mexican descent, this question may not be within its scope but merits consideration for future research.

Focused on later-generation U.S.-born Mexican Americans, Jiménez finds substantial assimilation over time. In agreement with classic assimilation theory, Jiménez reports socioeconomic advancement, residential assimilation, engagement in both ethnic and non-ethnic organizations, intermarriage, and decreased contact with extended kin in Mexico over time in both the California and Kansas field sites. An ideology of Americanization prevalent in the young adulthood of the eldest cohort encouraged these parents' reluctance to teach their children Spanish. Despite this intention, a replenished Spanish-dominant Mexican immigrant population provides opportunities to speak Spanish (p. 91). Irrespective of this "success" of integration and upward mobility, Mexican Americans tend to be assumed to be foreigners, primarily because "when immigration continues, race and foreignness are linked" (p. 161) and the mainstream cannot (or does not care to) distinguish the foreign-born from the native-born. This leads Jiménez to call the Mexican-origin population a "permanent immigrant group" (pp. 23, 178) that must struggle for integration, in part due to continuing immigration and attendant assumptions of foreignness despite birthright.

Jiménez's contribution of "immigrant replenishment" is a significant addition to assimilation theory. Consideration of the duration of immigration waves is important for understanding the context into which Mexican immigrants are received *and* the backdrop against which Mexican Americans craft their ethnic identity. While Jiménez

found more similarity than difference in his two field sites, steady immigration flows make an immigrant narrative available to the U.S.-born. Comparing the two sites Jiménez writes: “While the middle cohort [age thirty-four to fifty-five] in Garden City spoke in vague terms about their immigrant roots, the same cohort in Santa Maria invoked a Mexican-American narrative that is more steeped in the immigrant experience” (p. 98).

A class analysis also illuminates differences among the later-generation Mexican Americans. In a chapter devoted to Mexican American views on Mexican immigration, Jiménez finds that most respondents held accommodating views of immigration—the border should remain open—based on the logic that they are beneficiaries of the American dream and the dream should be available to all (pp. 183–7). However the middle and upper classes held the most accommodating views (p. 196), while a smaller group of lower-middle-class respondents was more restrictionist. In a more precarious position than those higher up on the socioeconomic ladder, lower-middle-class respondents worried that unrestricted immigration would negatively impact them, increasing competition for blue-collar jobs (pp. 190, 197). Similarly, “giving back” and helping the immigrant community was most common among the upwardly mobile because they viewed immigrants as “complements” rather than “replacements” (p. 238). Given the rigorous analysis of intra- and inter-ethnic boundaries as well as the influence of class on these processes, it is surprising that a similar analysis of the impact of gender is not undertaken. The overarching argument that immigration flows, be they continued or interrupted, shape assimilation patterns is convincing and well documented.

Joanna Dreby’s *Divided by Borders* is a multi-sited “domestic ethnography” (p. 4) that “follows the people” (p. 231) between the United States (New Jersey) and Mexico (Oaxaca), offering readers an in-depth examination of how international migration is “an inherently personal process” (p. 3). Linking the motivation for her research to the demographic phenomenon wherein 500,000 Mexican migrants came to the United States every year between 2003 and 2006 (p. 2), Dreby provides a careful analysis of the family lives of migrants who travel to the United States for work opportunities and leave their children behind in Mexico in the care of others where the cost of living is low.

Dreby’s methodology includes conducting interviews with 140 participants (family members and auxiliary), surveys of school children, and participant observation and interviews with a subset of twelve families she visited on multiple occasions. She is careful to cover the range of family forms that she encountered in the wider sample of interviews, ensuring that the twelve families with whom she conducted participant observation represented families where migrants were fathers, single-mothers, married couples, and married couples who migrated together but divorced in the United States.

Parents report that they migrate to the United States for the economic benefit of their children, hoping to provide them an adequate education in addition to daily necessities. Costs of migration run high, however. Parents endure an expensive and dangerous trip across the border in order to work low-end jobs for long hours and low pay. Parents tend to share overcrowded apartments in order to save money and send economic remittances back home. Numerous tensions arise from this arrangement that Dreby does not shy away from pointing out. While the education of children is central to parents’ sacrifices, high drop-out rates are the result of students hoping to migrate to the United States. In this picture, children model their aspirations after their parents who left them for work across the border. Migration is also a key way that children can reconnect with their parents. Some children—especially boys who are expected to become family breadwinners—use their parents’ social capital and financial resources

to migrate north (p. 17). An irony of the “immigrant bargain” (wherein kids are supposed to succeed educationally and make their parents’ sacrifices “worth it”) is that children with migrant parents drop out more so than do children of non-migrant parents (p. 128). Dreby skillfully notes that children regularly play a game on the merry-go-round where they want to be transported to “*el norte*” (p. 22), illustrating the “undeniable orientation toward *el norte* [that] permeates communities where many children’s parents have migrated” (pp. 18, 22).

Rather than stimulating a renegotiation of gender relations or gendered expectations of mothers and fathers, Dreby argues that transnational parenting “recreat[es] rather conventional definitions of parenthood” (p. 89). Parents and children report very similar feelings about the roles that mothers and fathers should have, despite being “divided by borders.” Respondents report that a father’s primary role is being the “family breadwinner” whereas a mother’s main role is to maintain emotional intimacy with her children (p. 81). Interestingly, even if the marriage is in conflict, sending money home makes the husband/father feel entitled to be head of the household. Showing the paramount importance of economic contributions to the conception of fatherhood, communication with children is predicated upon a father’s economic livelihood; communication will wane if that father is not sending money home. Similarly, traditional conceptions of motherhood are used to define transnational mothering despite clearly changed circumstances. Mothers are expected (and expect themselves) to maintain emotional bonds with their children despite the geographic distance (p. 83), and in this way, “mothers carry the moral burden of transnational parenting” (p. 87). While phone calls, remittances, and gift giving are common, mothers are not present to fulfill everyday emotional needs of children. These challenging circumstances do not promote mother-child bonding, and children (especially teenagers) are apt to be resentful or indifferent toward parents, ignore parental authority, and resist reunification efforts.

Maternal grandmothers are most often the caregivers of children who remain in Mexico. These relationships are less complicated than with other kin where parents are concerned about whether remittances are being spent wisely and children are well cared for. Regardless of the kinship, these caregivers are “intermediaries” who support rather than supplant the mother-child relationship (p. 175). Caregivers do not question the priority of the mother-child bond and mediate relationships between migrant parents and their children (p. 145). Despite geographic separation and emotional strain, “paradoxically . . . family ties are reinforced and even intensified during periods of separation” (p. 202). Dreby reports on children who do not comfortably fit in with the caregivers’ family, despite a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. What goes without mention, however, is the irony of the way that these transnational families “do family” by positioning biological kinship as trumping “fictive kinship” provided by caretakers. While extended family ties in Mexican families may in fact “ultimately support and reinforce parent-child obligations during migration” (p. 175), a clear downside is that prioritizing the absent parent in the minds and hearts of children works against their interest in and willingness to invest in meaningful relationships with non-grandparent guardians. Grandmother caregivers are the exception in that they are viewed as an extension of the mother and provide a clear link between mother and child. For other caregiver relationships, however, family ties that are reinforced by migration counteract the formation of alternative fictive kin bonds.

Another complication to transnational parenting is the creation of new families in the United States. At the same time as “parents may easily lose touch with their children’s development” (p. 143) as they toil for meager wages at U.S. jobs, some

migrant parents find new partners in the United States and proceed to have U.S.-born children. Migrant parents are far more involved in the day to day lives of these children by virtue of living in the same location. When this situation arises, Mexican children compete for parents' financial and emotional resources, making them feel even more abandoned and neglected than before. Dreby incisively notes that "U.S.-born children . . . undermine parents' statements that migration to the United States was undertaken for the sake of their children back in Mexico" (p. 69). Children's well-founded fears and disappointments about emotional and physical distance from parents illustrate the painful feelings they have as a consequence of parents' calculated decisions to migrate in the name of improving the lives of their children. It is the detailing of the often-unforeseen consequences of international migration on restructured families that makes *Divided by Borders* an important addition to both family and migration scholarship.

In addition to illuminating different aspects of the consequences of international migration, both books productively address the role of time. Assimilation studies inherently deal with time (often in terms of cohorts or generations) and these two studies are no exception, yet they also creatively deal with the issue. Jiménez offers a conventional analysis of time, dividing his 123 respondents, ranging in age from fifteen to ninety-eight, into three birth cohorts. This is fruitful in order to distinguish varying opinions, such as his finding that the youngest cohort of respondents (ages fifteen to thirty-four) is most strongly influenced by multicultural beliefs (they claim that race/ethnicity is unimportant in choice of romantic partner (p. 86) and are able to take advantage of diversity incentives such as affirmative action programs and extra pay for bilingual abilities (pp. 129–131)). Jiménez's use of time is not limited to analyses using birth cohorts and historical periods to consider progression over time. He views assimilation as a "process" (p. 69) as opposed to an "endpoint" (p. 67). Assimilation as a "process" evaluates how each successive generation fares relative to its parent generation as opposed to measuring whether/when ethnic groups achieve parity with third-generation whites on numerous outcomes. Viewing assimilation as a "process" relaxes the focus on variable-oriented outcome measures and allows for descriptive assessments of processes over time. Using the concept of "nostalgia" that is clearly linked to the passage of time, Jiménez states: "belonging in the larger American national narrative is reserved for groups whose immigrant experience is behind them. . . . No similar feeling of nostalgia is associated with Mexican immigration because it is ongoing" (p. 261).

Dreby's multi-year ethnography also provides insight into the role time plays in international migration and adjustment. Dreby describes "time dislocations" wherein "parents may easily lose touch with their children's development, which can occur remarkably quickly in contrast to the slow pace in which parents meet their goals as migrant workers" (p. 143). Among transnational families, time is uncoordinated, a consequence of geographic distance and parents' waning familiarity with their children. An example of this is age-inappropriate gifts—clothes in sizes too small—that reveals a disconnection between parents' and children's lives. Time can function in families to both cause and heal wounds. Parents are stressed over the large amounts of time it costs to amass the finances necessary to return to their children or bring their children to the United States. Separation often lasts longer than intended. Children, in turn, are clearly distressed about separation from their parents, repeatedly asking them to return and acting out at both home and school. Yet, Dreby asserts, as time marches on and children grow to be young adults, they are more empathic with their parents since they now have their own romantic relationships and economic responsibilities.

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*Replenished Ethnicity* and *Divided by Borders* offer complementary analyses of international migration from Mexico to the United States. The former reveals community-level and interpersonal interactions that both erode and instantiate ethnic boundaries while the latter examines migration's effects on families separated by space and time. Concerned with bonds and divisions, these extensively researched and well-written books offer compelling arguments and poignant pictures of both the long- and near-term consequences of international migration and assimilation.

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