

WRITING TRANSNATIONALISM:  
Recent Publications on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands\*

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- NEW VIEWS OF BORDERLANDS HISTORY.* Edited by Robert H. Jackson. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Pp. 239. \$40.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- BORDER CROSSINGS: MEXICAN AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN WORKERS.* Edited by John M. Hart. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1998. Pp. 246. \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)
- THE TERROR OF THE MACHINE: TECHNOLOGY, WORK, GENDER, AND ECOLOGY ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER.* By Devon G. Peña. (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1997. Pp. 461. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS OF THE MAQUILADORA: LIFE HISTORIES OF WOMEN WORKERS IN TIJUANA.* By Norma Iglesias Prieto, with a foreword by Henry Selby. Translated by Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. Pp. 115. \$20.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.)
- BORDER VISIONS: MEXICAN CULTURES OF THE SOUTHWEST UNITED STATES.* By Carlos Vélaz-Ibáñez. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996. Pp. 361. \$19.95 paper.)
- BORDER MATTERS: REMAPPING AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES.* By José David Saldívar. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. 251. \$15.95 paper.)
- CULTURE ACROSS BORDERS: MEXICAN IMMIGRATION AND POPULAR CULTURE.* Edited by María Herrera-Sobek and David R. Maciel. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998. Pp. 268. \$16.95 paper.)
- THE MILITARIZATION OF THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER, 1978-1992.* By Timothy Dunn. (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1996. Pp. 307. \$35.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

\*I wish to thank Brian Haley, Travis DuBry, and especially Paul Vanderwood for their comments on an earlier draft of this review.

The borderlands between Mexico and the United States have long been characterized by both fascination and misunderstanding. A region first colonized by Spain beginning in the sixteenth century and later captured by an incipient U.S. empire, the two-thousand-mile international boundary from the twin cities of Brownsville and Matamoros on the Gulf of Mexico west to San Diego and Tijuana on the Pacific Ocean is today eliciting much concern among academics, journalists, businesspersons, politicians, and citizens of both countries.

The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has done much to promote new discussion and controversy about the border. Recent tragedies such as the death of several Mexican immigrants and the rescue of nearly fifty others in the canyons of rural San Diego County in April 1999 testify to the need for increased understanding and cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, much academic writing on the region has been produced by scholars who have worked largely in isolation or at cross-purposes with one another. This situation has discouraged the exchange of ideas, opinions, and possible solutions for problems of exploitation, racism, sexism, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. What is needed in these times of accelerated transnational "flows" of capital and information is a more integrated approach to "the borderlands." Some analysts have recently begun to challenge old divisions and are producing work that examines carefully the historic encounter between Mexico and the United States. In some of the best new literature, scholars are turning their attention to the complex negotiation between cultures rather than viewing this encounter in stark terms of "us versus them." This essay will review a handful of recent publications on subjects ranging from pre-Hispanic to contemporary times in search of new insights and perspectives on this controversial terrain.

### *Colonial Society*

Following the initial contact between indigenous peoples and Spanish explorers in the mid-sixteenth century, areas that today are northern Mexico and the southwestern United States increasingly came under the control of the Spanish crown. Gradually, the Spaniards established frontier institutions such as *presidios* (military garrisons) and missions that helped pave the way for further colonization and economic development.

In tracing the many aspects of this complicated cultural encounter, *New Views of Borderlands History* provides a discussion of colonial society on the "fringes of Spanish Empire" in North America from California east to Florida. Particularly important in this history edited by Robert Jackson is the emphasis on interaction and negotiation between different social

1. "At Least 7 Migrants Perish in Cold," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Apr. 1999, pp. 1, 14.

groups. The first essay by Susan Deeds examines colonial Chihuahua, where the hunt for precious metals proved to be the early attraction for Spanish settlers. Agriculture and other commercial enterprise soon followed. As Deeds notes, "Colonization was not a steadily advancing process from south to north since it tended to occur around silver mines and labor sources" (p. 24).

As many indigenous peoples fell victim to disease and coercive practices that were overlooked by royal officials, some natives decided to resist the Europeans. An attack by thousands of Tepehuán warriors and their allies on Spanish settlements in 1616 was in Deeds's words "testimony to the fragility of the Spanish presence" (p. 26). Continued hostility between different groups made Chihuahua a volatile region for much of the colonial period. Meantime, Spanish explorers had ventured north into what is now New Mexico, searching for the mythical El Dorado.<sup>2</sup> Ross Frank's contribution to *New Views of Borderlands History* recounts how the Europeans established a settlement near present-day San Juan Pueblo and soon began to build a mission, reinforce the military, and recruit labor for mining and other undertakings. A revolt by the Pueblo Indians in 1680, however, forced most of the newcomers out of the region temporarily. A little over a decade later, Spanish colonists "reconquered" the area.

In describing the changing character of Spanish-Indian relations during this critical time, Frank suggests that while Spanish and Pueblo residents managed to rebuild the missions, "the Franciscans had to give up any attempt to dominate the internal Pueblo social and political order" (p. 52). Efforts to impose European cultural values regarding work, marriage, and religion soon coexisted with kiva ceremonies and kachina dances. According to Frank, "This arrangement represented a compromise between the domination and authority of the Spanish governors and Pueblo resistance to renewed oppression" (p. 52).

In the latter part of the essay, Frank develops his discussion of local cultural encounter by describing the various ways that *vecinos* and Indians negotiated categories of race and ethnicity. Here, Frank draws on a historical account of a woman of mixed Spanish and Indian blood named Juana Hurtado.<sup>3</sup> According to this interesting tale, Juana "La Galvana" used family and community connections along with a working knowledge of Navajo to establish herself as a respected member of her local community.

Nicely complementing the two preceding essays is Robert Jackson's piece on the Pimeria Alta (which includes modern-day Sonora and Arizona south of the Gila River) and Baja and Alta California. He considers how the native population engaged in a long period of negotiation with the Euro-

2. El Dorado was a mythical city of gold sought by the Spanish.

3. See James Brooks, "'This Evil Extends . . . Especially to the Feminine Sex': Negotiating Captivity in the New Mexico Borderlands," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1996):279–309.

pean settlers. Jackson provides a detailed account of missionary strategies to gain influence over Indians, patterns of European settlement, and types of economic development in northern New Spain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He notes the different ways in which these three regions were colonized by the Spanish but concludes that "the Indian populations in all three regions were condemned to gradual extinction . . ." (p. 76).

In a comparable mode, Jesús de la Teja sketches the diversity of Native American groups in the area that later became Texas. Noting the province's distance from viceregal control and its proximity to French Louisiana, de la Teja observes, "Many Indian groups quickly learned to set European rivals against each other" (p. 111). Compared with colonial efforts in east Texas, missions along the San Antonio River Valley (including the mission San Antonio de Valero, or "the Alamo") met with some success in the eighteenth century. Many Indians nevertheless refused to adapt to the more sedentary ways required by mission life.

Meanwhile, frontier life in Texas attracted only a small number of Spanish settlers until the last years of colonial rule. Spanish population took hold to a greater extent in only three areas: in the San Antonio River Valley, along the coast near Matagorda Bay, and in eastern Texas near present-day Nacogdoches. Spanish attempts to incorporate other parts of the province proved unsuccessful. For the most part, the province remained "an economic backwater" during the colonial period.

Negotiation and engagement among "underclass" mestizos, mulattos, blacks, detribalized Indians, and Spaniards are the focus of Peter Stern's contribution to *New Views of Borderlands History*, "Marginals and Acculturation in Frontier Society." Stern draws on a wide variety of sources (including travel accounts, letters, and government documents) to convey a clear sense of the many ways in which individuals maneuvered in colonial society despite prescribed boundaries of caste and class. He also presents several individual cases to show how residents of the borderlands engaged in an array of relationships across ethnic lines. Important here is Stern's assertion that this social process "was in no sense an unequal or one-way exchange, from the European to the Indian [but] operated in both directions" (p. 173). His ideas are consistent with more recent theorizing suggesting that these transcultural encounters also led to the historic construction of various hybrid identities and the invention of new traditions.

The final essay by Patricia Wickman relies almost totally on secondary sources to demonstrate that Spanish colonization took root in a large area (all of the present-day U.S. Southeast) inhabited by an array of indigenous groups. Florida was initially a key enterprise zone, but demographic collapse among the native population, the exhaustion of placer-gold deposits, and colonization of new areas in Mexico and South America

made Florida less important after the mid-sixteenth century. As a result, the area came under increasing attack from Spain's European rivals.

Taken together, the essays in *New Views of Borderlands History* offer a well-informed and detailed treatment of borderlands history during the colonial period. Often synthesizing previous debates in the literature, the essayists present up-to-date scholarship on each region while taking care to understand the complex interaction among different cultural groups.

### *Labor Histories*

Moving into the nineteenth century, a volume that presents new opportunities for "doing" comparative labor and cultural history is *Border Crossings: Mexican and Mexican-American Workers*, edited by John Hart. Although not focused exclusively on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, each of the ten offerings in the volume discuss matters of identity, community, culture, and collective action. As a whole, the book covers a wide variety of cases ranging from central Mexico to Chicago while highlighting the many connections between workers on both sides of the Río Grande.

Hart's introductory essay analyzes the gradual emergence of a workers' culture and early responses to the development of capitalism. The following three essays deal with working-class formation in mid-to-late nineteenth-century Mexico. Mario Camarena Ocampo and Susana Fernández Apango describe confrontations between owners of textile mills and workers in the municipality of San Angel, an area containing several small towns in the central valley of Mexico just southwest of Mexico City. These authors report that laborers, in standing up for their rights, drew on established traditions in peasant and artisanal production. At the same time, however, the first generation of factory workers during the 1860s and 1870s also began to take advantage of the prevailing elite Liberal discourse that advocated—at least on paper—equal treatment for Mexican citizens. Camarena Ocampo and Fernández Apango assert that these ideas gradually came together in the factory setting in a way that encouraged laborers to view themselves as more of a "cohesive class" (p. 34).

Another contributor to *Border Crossings* concerned with the question of working-class formation is Bernardo García Díaz, who examines the history of textile production in the Orizaba Valley in Veracruz around 1900. He first discusses ways in which the local geography lent itself to textile production and focuses on those who came to work in the factories from areas outside of Veracruz (including Puebla, Oaxaca, Mexico City, and Tlaxcala). García Díaz then recounts how these individuals were introduced to the industrial culture: "Those familiar with the incipient industrial environment at Orizaba were the ones who absorbed the newcomers and educated them about the factory world. They integrated the new arrivals by teaching

them how to do tasks, and by showing them the manners of worker conduct through their everyday examples. They taught them the urban concept of time, reinforced by the factories' sirens" (pp. 64–65). García Díaz also describes a process in which more established workers encouraged the creation of new social identities and forms of association. Yet despite the extraordinary size of the labor force in the Orizaba Valley, García Díaz concludes that workers remained a highly heterogeneous bunch.

The essay by Carmen Ramos Escandón that follows is concerned with gender issues in the history of Mexican working-class formation. Considering how gender and work relations are interrelated, she argues for what she views as the emergence of "an explicitly feminine labor consciousness" in turn-of-the-century industrial relations. Support for this assertion comes in her discussion of the Hijas de Anáhuac, Mexico's first all-female labor organization, which was founded in 1907 under the auspices of the Liberal party.

After the long and bitter civil war, the framing of the Constitution of 1917 promised land reform (Article 27) and basic rights for labor (Article 123). As the conflict transformed the national political discourse, many Mexicans soon observed important changes in their own lives. In 1921, for example, citizens in the port of Veracruz elected Partido de Trabajo candidate Rafael "El Negro" García as mayor. This event, as Elizabeth Jean Norvell points out in "Syndicalism and Citizenship: Postrevolutionary Worker Mobilizations in Veracruz," helped spark a series of popular actions in the city (including labor and tenant strikes) that were intended to wrest power from the local elite.

Similarly, Alberto Olvera Rivera's discussion of the Poza Rica petroleum workers in *Border Crossings* describes how labor organizers during the 1930s constructed a shared language centered on class and citizenship. These strategies encouraged the emergence of a local working-class consciousness and allowed for the creation of a powerful independent oil workers' union for most of the decade. Together, these essays set in the state of Veracruz enhance understanding of the complex world of postrevolutionary Mexican society.

More in line with the volume's title, the final four essays of *Border Crossings* cross the U.S.-Mexico border to discuss the history of Mexican labor in Texas, Arizona, California, and Chicago. Beginning with Emilio Zamora's "Labor Formation, Community, and Politics: The Mexican Working Class in Texas, 1900–1945," each of the four essays details immigration patterns, development of various local communities, labor conditions, organizing, and politics.

As Zamora notes, immigration during the early decades of the twentieth century "coupled with barriers to mobility bloated the bottom segment of the Mexican working class" in the United States (p. 141). Still, some enjoyed a degree of success: "Mexican-owned enterprises such as grocery

stores, restaurants, tailor shops, newspapers, private schools and small construction companies also grew and became new sources of employment for the unskilled as well as for the skilled and professional workers" (p. 141). During the 1930s, however, economic depression, unemployment, scapegoating, and repatriation hit Mexicans and Mexican-Americans hard.<sup>4</sup> In the following decade, the Bracero Program (1942–1964) brought almost the same number of Mexican laborers back into the United States to work in the fields. Many others returned to take jobs in garment making, meatpacking, construction, shipping, aircraft repair, and oil production, industries created by the wartime economy. Zamora comments, "Discrimination . . . continued to deny Mexicans the full advantages of wartime job opportunities" despite the economic recovery (p. 143). To make matters worse, segregation forced most Mexicans to live in crowded urban barrios throughout the states and elsewhere.

Mexicans in Arizona employed by the big copper-mining companies (Phelps Dodge, American Smelting and Refining, Anaconda, and Kennecott) also faced discrimination on the job and in the community. Yet as Antonio Ríos Bustamante observes in "As Guilty as Hell: Mexican Copper Miners and Their Communities in Arizona, 1920–1950," the many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who constituted the majority of copper workers did not take efforts to subordinate them during the so-called Quiet Era of the 1920s and 1930s lying down. Beginning with efforts around 1900 by the Western Federation of Miners in Arizona, hundreds of mine workers organized across ethnic and national lines despite often violent repression.

The portrait that Ríos Bustamante paints of living conditions in the mining towns is reminiscent of popular Mexican neighborhoods throughout the U.S. Southwest during the 1920s and 1930s:

Low wages . . . ensured cheap and rudimentary dwellings ranging in type from wood frame, stone, tin or adobe, and in size from one to three rooms. Some had concrete or stone foundations, but others were merely dirt-floored tin shacks or *jacales* built of brush frames plastered with mud. Still others combined these styles to reflect the changing circumstances of their inhabitants and adaptations over time. The houses were frequently packed close together with little yard space. Unpaved paths led to those located far from streets and at the top or bottom of hills. (Pp. 170–71)

Separate housing areas for Anglos in many of the mining towns served only to emphasize the unequal nature of a regional political economy based on discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.<sup>5</sup>

4. On this period, see Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); and Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

5. Unfortunately, the "copper barons" did not limit their control to Arizona but used the same kind of discriminatory practices also in Chile and Mexico (at Cananea and Nacozari, Sonora, for example).

Regarding the history of Mexican labor in Chicago, Gerardo Necochea Gracia considers ways in which workers made effective use of mutual aid, unionism, and strikes to resist subordination by employers. Devra Weber sketches a social history of Mexicans in California over the twentieth century. Here, as several other contributors to *Border Crossings* also suggest, cooperative practices undertaken by Mexicans helped them face many challenges at work and in the community. As Weber points out, the determination of Mexican workers (many of them women) became clear during a series of agricultural strikes in the 1930s. Their efforts revealed the many historical connections and truly binational social reality of many California workers at a time when *transnationalism* and *globalism* were not yet fashionable terms. Weber's musings on worker connections north and south of the Río Grande make a fitting conclusion to *Border Crossings* in the sense that all these histories are in one way or another parts of a larger narrative of labor in the Americas.

Contributing to more contemporary perspectives on labor, Devon Peña's *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* offers a grand critique of capitalist production in Mexico's maquiladoras. Beginning with a discussion of nineteenth-century England's "dark satanic mills," Peña examines how various "discourses of domination" have taken shape in the maquiladoras.

Peña's analysis concentrates on plants producing computer electronics and automotive parts in Ciudad Juárez. These sites, he claims, "embrace Taylorist and Fordist organizational principles to an extent unmatched by other sectors in the maquila industry" (pp. 57–58). Describing the division of labor within these assembly plants, Peña tells how various strategies of bureaucratic control—such as distribution of workers on the assembly line, productivity, quality management supervision, and various methods designed to confront worker resistance—are deployed to regulate social relations while maintaining high levels of production. Peña also points out that company influence is not limited to hours spent inside the plant: "The search for social control in the maquiladoras extends beyond the shop floor into the personal and family lives of workers" (p. 92). Hygiene classes, incentive programs, beauty pageants, picnics, raffles, and various recreational activities all represent attempts to influence workers' home and personal lives.

In part, the strength of *The Terror of the Machine* lies in Peña's descriptions of production and his appreciation of the many ways that workers have negotiated and in some cases engaged in forms of informal resistance of the circumstances of their employment. More than 60 percent of those interviewed disclosed that they had engaged in output restriction (slowdowns) or what they call *tortuguismo*. On occasion, workers organized this kind of resistance by strategizing outside work. As labor leader Juana Martínez told Peña, "From the start, the group was clandestine. Our



actions in the factory were invisible until the time we hit [management] with the walkout and sabotage. Sometimes it was necessary to meet after work since they closely watched over us. . . . We formed little groups (*bolitas*), had dinners and parties. We talked about the problems and made plans for the next day at work" (p. 122). As Peña points out, informal protest and organizing against production speedup sometimes gained momentum and turned into more full-blown confrontations with management.

According to Peña, "the women workers of Mexico's maquiladoras also develop[ed] a variety of ideological and political perspectives to contest the legitimacy of managerial authority" (p. 21). In Ciudad Juárez, these "new perspectives" enabled women to take part in strike activity. Politicization also gave rise to the well-known Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) and the garbage workers' cooperative Sociedad Cooperativa de Seleccionadores de Materiales (SOCOSESMA). Collective efforts also led to other independent worker organizations such as Despacho Obrero and Solidaridad Obrero, which have taken up a wide range of issues including occupational hazards, sexual harassment, and various forms of wage and job discrimination.

Some sections of *The Terror of the Machine* unfortunately suffer from overdetermined theorizing and romanticized views of worker activity. And despite its 1997 publication, much of the material in the book predates the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. These problems notwithstanding, Peña's critique of capitalist social relations as manifested in the maquiladoras is clearly articulated, as is his obvious commitment to the battle against "the terror of the machine."

Another book that focuses on many of the same issues is Norma Iglesias Prieto's *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*. In the eight chapters of this concise yet powerful volume, the author distills information gathered in more than fifty interviews to discuss labor conditions, composition of the workforce, strategies of management control over production, and women's forms of resistance. Originally published in Mexico in 1985, this new English-language edition has been updated with a foreword by anthropologist Henry Selby and was carefully translated by Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler.

Commenting on changes in Mexico since the first edition of *Beautiful Flowers*, Selby observes that the devaluation of the peso under President Ernesto Zedillo has caused wages to decline. Men now make up a larger percentage of the maquiladora workforce than they did in the 1980s. Unemployment and underemployment in Mexico were worse in the 1990s than during the mid-1980s. Making matters worse, unions "are now as completely at the beck and call of the state as they have ever been, and employers have lost all fear of labor mobilizations" (p. x). At the same time, conditions in the plants remain largely the same as when they were first established back in the mid-1960s. Unsafe working environments, produc-

tion speedups, and patronizing attitudes toward women by male supervisors combine to make the maquiladoras extremely difficult places to work. Those who brave the factory floors do so largely because they need the money.

Throughout *Beautiful Flowers*, the workers' vivid testimony forms a powerful indictment against the exploitative conditions under which many labor. As one woman lamented, "in the maquiladoras they exploit us a lot; all the livelong day they keep us working as rapidly as a machine, and without any protection. The conditions are so bad that we soon become ill, and then because we are no longer of service to them, they run us off with impunity. We have no guarantees" (p. 100). Such keen awareness is overcome by the need to work. Women of the maquiladoras (and now many men) "are grateful and feel indebted to the firm for having given them a job. . . . This is the great contradiction that pervades all the cases . . . , [and] it is in precisely this contradiction that the foundations of labor organizing must be sought" (p. 100). Well-written and supported by strong testimony, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora* communicates clearly the need for citizens on both sides of the border to understand better the situations of maquiladora workers.

### Cultural Studies

Regarding questions of culture in Northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, Carlos Véllez-Ibáñez's *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* offers an ambitious commentary on various binational issues in history, politics, literature, and art. Throughout the book, Véllez-Ibáñez argues for a broad understanding of the region from pre-Hispanic to contemporary times: "Imaginary political borders do not define the historical or cultural mosaic of this region nor of its Mexican population in the present. . . . the vision here is that the population is engaged in the processes of cultural creation, accommodation, rejection, and acceptance—all occurring simultaneously over a very long period of time" (pp. 8–9). In sketching some of the earliest history of the region, Véllez-Ibáñez describes the initial settlement of the Southwest and subsequent Mesoamerican influence beginning around 300 B.C. After tracing the rise of various trading and population centers, he then considers briefly the impact of Spanish colonization in Sonora, Chihuahua, New Mexico, Texas, and California from the sixteenth century into the nineteenth. Central to this history is a social dynamic that the author calls "cultural bumping," his shorthand for a wide range of interaction, exchange, and influence:

Sometimes the bumping process is so onerous that it eliminates much of the "bumped" population by a combination of disease, famine, and war. In other instances, combinations of repression, accommodation, and integration within specific class groups unfold and reshape the structure of relations within the impacted

population. At other times even the conqueror changes, and the local versions of culture become refreshed and enhanced by the conquering population. Whether divided by geography, language, or culture, human populations often may become more distinct but sometimes more similar after bumping into one another. . . . The bumping process of peoples and institutions continues to this day. . . . (Pp. 5–6)

Vélez-Ibáñez repeatedly perceives “cultural bumping” in the region under Spanish colonial rule, but the bumping becomes colliding when Anglo settlers enter the picture. In characterizing the encounter between Mexicans and “Americans,” Vélez-Ibáñez employs terms like “consistent destruction,” “decimated populations,” and “cultural subordination.” For him, the encounter brought by U.S. expansionism into the Southwest does not fall into the category of “cultural bumping,” despite his seemingly applicable definition presented earlier. Instead, “Americans” (with the exception of those Anglos before the Mexican-American War whom he claims “acculturated to Mexican religion and customs”) engaged in “illegal trade,” brought an “encroaching capitalist economy” to the region, and thus caused rampant destruction. In Vélez-Ibáñez’s words, “From as far away as Wisconsin, Delaware, Alabama, and Pennsylvania, Delawares, Shawnees, and other groups, displaced by continued American expansion, also traveled west to California and preyed upon the ranchos. . . . from whatever point of view, the result was the same throughout the region: devastated ranches, burned-out villages, and abandoned farms” (p. 61).

While the Texas Revolution, the Mexican-American War, and its aftermath undoubtedly sped the development of Anglo-style capitalism in the Southwest, it seems unwise for Vélez-Ibáñez to drop his notion of “cultural bumping” in discussing the transition from Spanish to Anglo colonial rule. His conflation of “Americanization” with the growing commodification of social relations suggests that virtually no kind of constructive cultural encounter took place between Latinos and Anglos. Thus despite the early discussion of cultural exchange, *Border Visions* unfortunately ends up asserting an essentially separatist position on cross-cultural relations.

Dealing with many of the same issues from a more inclusive yet no less critical perspective is José David Saldívar’s *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. The author acknowledges how a legacy of conquest long associated with Anglo imperialism in the region has “rendered the dynamic cultural life of the site-specific *frontera* invisible to the rest of the United States” (pp. 189–90). Saldívar then points to what he sees as a multifaceted cultural encounter taking place in that various forms of domination have “also obscured the important hybrid cultural forms that workers from both sides of the border have produced” (pp. 189–90). He earlier defines the mission of *Border Matters* as being “to locate the study of Chicano/a literature in a broad cultural framework, going beyond literature to examine issues of expression and representation in folklore, music, and video performance art [as well as] recent theorizing about the U.S./Mexico

border zone as a paradigm of crossings, intercultural exchanges, circulation, resistances, and negotiations . . ." (p. ix).

Taking these various expressions of popular culture seriously, *Border Matters* begins by discussing the musical group Los Tigres del Norte, well-known throughout Greater Mexico. Saldívar points out that "the same circuits of late capitalism that brought low wage jobs to California also carried the band's *conjunto* sound to Silicon Valley and beyond" (p. 4). His discussion of the group's undocumented migration to San Jose, California, from the state of Sinaloa in the 1970s as well as one of their popular songs titled "Jaula de Oro" (The Gilded Cage) begins his exploration of "the materially hybrid and often recalcitrant quality of literary and (mass) cultural forms in the extended U.S.-Mexican borderlands" (p. 5).

Saldívar seeks to establish a "renewed mass cultural ground for an alternative critique of the narrative of the nation" (p. 8). This narrative would be one that recognizes the culture and contribution of immigrants to the United States rather than viewing them as "invaders" or merely focusing on the "pathological" aspects of migration and cultural encounter. As a result, *Border Matters* constitutes a bold attempt to bring together the worlds of Mexican and Mexican-American culture with recent intellectual trends produced by the U.S. and British cultural studies movement. The implications of such an endeavor are wide-ranging:

Throughout *Border Matters* I [attempt] to draw attention to the variety of ways in which some U.S.-Mexico border writers and activist-intellectuals have begun the work of exploring the terrors of border crossing and diaspora amid the debris of what *El Vez* calls our "national scar" of manifest destiny and the cultures of U.S. imperialism. . . . [B]y highlighting the contributions U.S.-Mexico border writers have made to mainline America, I mean to remind those made anxious by diaspora's borders that millions of new (im)migrants, many of whom are refugees from Central America, Mexico, Vietnam, Korea, India and Pakistan, have irrevocably settled in the United States "without papers." (P. 197)

Saldívar points out that the new culture continues to be highly stratified and segregated but is also a place where questions about modernity, post-modernity, and postcoloniality must be asked. As the United States is increasingly transformed by immigrants, also implicit in this enterprise is the question of what and who is "American" these days.

Saldívar's voice is an important one among a growing group of musicians, writers, artists, and activists who assert that border society and by extension much of the Americas are "contact zones" inhabited by a variety of subjectivities and increasingly hybrid cultures. Echoing the words of Néstor García Canclini, Saldívar suggests that in order to learn from the dynamic exchange that takes place across cultures, academics "need a trans-disciplinary model more sensitive 'to the opening of each discipline with the other'" (p. 9). This business of "remapping American cultural studies" should provide greater knowledge, appreciation, and respect for diversity

(and a real move away from WASP hegemony as well as outmoded nationalist critiques of Anglo domination) but also a political and cultural re-defining of “mainline society.” Despite some passages clouded by excessive academic referencing and phraseology, *Border Matters* represents an important resource for discussing the current and future status of “American cultural studies” because it addresses the many new identities and cultures currently being constructed.

Along similar lines, *Culture across Borders: Mexican Immigration and Popular Culture*, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and David Maciel, presents six well-informed essays discussing Mexican labor, immigration, and culture. Particularly intriguing here are discussions of various examples of fiction, art, music, jokes, and films depicting Mexican immigration to the United States from “Mexican,” “Chicano,” and “mainstream” perspectives. As scholarship has blossomed on both sides of the border in recent decades, the editors note, “cultural elements of Mexican immigration and the cultural/artistic manifestations that this immigration process inspired have not received the academic inquiry that they merit” (p. 17). What Herrera-Sobek and Maciel seem to have in mind is exploring the past with an eye toward the transnational present and future.

Juan Gómez-Quiñones and David Maciel’s essay on labor history points out the various ways that Mexican immigrants have been subjected to racist views and cites examples of migrants joining together to demand their rights. Alberto Ledesma follows with a discussion of immigrants in literary texts, beginning with the story of Joaquín Murrieta and going on to more recent offerings such as Ernesto Galarza’s *Barrio Boy* (1971), Estela Portillo Trambley’s *Trini* (1986), and Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek* (1992). Ledesma points out several significant differences between Chicano and Mexican views of immigration:

Whereas Mexican *bracero* narratives of immigration portray temporary immigrants in *tragi-heroic* terms . . . , in Chicana and Chicano narratives prominent immigrant figures . . . tend to be those whose immigration to the United States is permanent. In other words, while Mexican narratives of immigration focus on the racial/ethnic and class struggles that Mexican immigrants experience while in the United States, Chicana and Chicano narratives of immigration concentrate their attention on the redefinition of identity, on the constant adjustments that Mexicans who are now living in the United States need to negotiate their new cultural surroundings. (Pp. 87–88)

Victor Alejandro Sorell discusses ways that immigration has been represented in recent art, while José Reyna and María Herrera-Sobek analyze similar themes in their essay “Jokelore, Cultural Differences, and Linguistic Dexterity: The Construction of the Mexican Immigrant in Chicano Humor.”

Probably the most original parts of the *Culture across Borders* are found in sections devoted to film, one of the most influential mediums in

contemporary society. Here Maciel and María Rosa García-Acevedo's "The Celluloid Immigrant: The Narrative Films of Mexican Immigration" as well as Herrera-Sobek's "The Corrido as Hypertext: Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Films and the Mexican/Chicano Ballad" provide rich discussions of Mexican immigration as portrayed in Mexican and U.S. cinema from 1900 to the present. Particularly important is the fact that these essays compare cinematic perspectives about (largely undocumented) immigration on both sides of the border.

Maciel and García-Acevedo note that Mexican films such as *Espaldas mojadas* (1954) portrayed the many difficulties immigrants face in leaving Mexico and crossing into the United States. According to the authors, these Mexican films projected a clear message meant to discourage Mexicans from going to the United States. Conversely, Hollywood depictions of the situation, such as *Borderline* (1980) and *The Border* (1982), have generally tended to be ignorant of the various "push" factors causing Mexicans to go north. Their stock B-movie action format has featured a few well-known stars (like Charles Bronson and Jack Nicholson) and stressed the "need" to control what many see as the flow of undocumented immigration coming from Mexico. Maciel and García-Acevedo argue that more recent portrayals by Chicanos—especially films by director Gregory Nava (such as *El Norte*)—have provided more accurate representations of the immigrant experience. The reason may be that Nava's perspective is transnational in scope.

While these and several other books focusing on "border culture" continue to draw attention to the many kinds of negotiations between individuals and groups, Timothy Dunn's *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992* serves as a dark reminder of how the business of "border control" remains a contentious and disturbing matter. In this well-written book, Dunn describes the escalation of what he calls "low-intensity conflict" between immigrants and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service during the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. At the same time, Dunn notes a corresponding rise in human rights violations committed by military and security forces. Militarization has led to a number of serious problems: "A militarized approach to immigration and drug issues leads down an ill-fated path, and consequently warrants ample scrutiny. . . . In addressing these difficult and complex issues, special endeavors should be made to avoid sacrificing the rights and well-being of subordinated minority groups for the real or supposed benefit of the majority or more privileged groups, because to do otherwise is not only fundamentally unjust, it is also ultimately a menace to the rights and well-being of us all" (pp. 171-72). Open markets coupled with a militarization of the border is not the way to go. Dunn's powerful account calls for new transnational approaches to the border that respect the human rights of migrants and encourage dialogue.

## Conclusions

Those in power today on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border need to acknowledge the increasingly complex and transnational character of the world. Rather than simply paying neoliberal lip service to these transformations, they need to act in ways that promote equality, respect for human rights, and understanding between different cultures.

Several years after the passage of NAFTA, the idea of some policy makers that a social and political separation between Mexico and the United States can be maintained while the flow of investment and capital across the border accelerates is a deeply flawed and troubling notion. To combat this current state of affairs, citizens, artists, scholars, and politicians must find ways to facilitate transborder alliances. Transnational advocacy that is responsive to human needs can help combat poverty, inequality, racism, and environmental despoliation.

Because we live in an increasingly interdependent world, efforts to communicate across cultural borders must be made to promote greater understanding and respect. We can all learn from the experiences of those who reside in border areas because they have long been grounded in more than one culture. They have faced ambiguity, cultural mixing, fragmentation, synthesis, and hybridity on a daily basis. By presenting a complex vision of the history, culture, and current struggles taking place in "the borderlands," each of the eight books reviewed here makes a unique contribution to understanding the past, present, and future of the United States, Mexico, and the Americas as a whole.

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