

David G. Gutierrez. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. xiii + 320 pp. \$48.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-08322-6.



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Historian David Gutierrez's provocative study of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, *Walls and Mirrors*, could not have come at a more timely moment. As immigration again comes to the forefront of public debate, as the role of immigrants, both documented and undocumented, again comes under scrutiny, Gutierrez provides us with a well-researched investigation of the issues surrounding immigration, but from a different perspective than most. It is a look at the debate from within the Mexican American community, and it sheds light on a number of significant issues. What are the historic links between immigration, civil rights, and ethnicity? How have Mexican American organizations and activists strategized politically vis-a-vis immigration and citizenship during this century? How have Mexican Americans perceived themselves, their role in U.S. society, and their relationship to both long-term Mexican residents and *los recién llegados*, the recent immigrants. In *Walls and Mirrors*, Gutierrez explores the often-shifting contours of this intriguing, yet largely neglected subject, through his chronologically-organized study of Mexican

American activists and organizations in Texas and California.

As Gutierrez writes in his introduction, Mexicans and Mexican Americans have always been aware of the differences between them, yet few studies have focused on the nature of this relationship and the forces which have shaped it. Like the larger society, scholars have often treated Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants as if they were all the same, ignoring that the relationship between the two groups has been fraught with ambivalence and contradiction. Although over the years, studies have hinted at the depth of this complex, often contradictory, relationship, there have been few attempts to delve into its intricacies. Gutierrez's long-needed study sets out to examine both the "differences that divided and the commonalities that bound the two groups together-- the walls and mirrors..." (p. 4) through a social and political history which examines the ways in which Mexican Americans organized politically around issues of immigration.

Using diverse manuscript collections, government documents, newspapers, and organizational

records, as well as many of the now-classic community, regional, and immigration studies published in the last two decades, Gutierrez has managed not so much to present totally new information (particularly in the early chapters) as to present it within a new context. Herein lies the importance of this work--Gutierrez has gleaned from this collection of primary and secondary material a story of intra-ethnic relations which others have alluded to, but which few have centered in their analysis of Mexican American and Chicano history. And although, as Gutierrez acknowledges, only a small percentage of Mexican Americans participated in the political organizations highlighted in his study, the organizations, their work, their strategies and their rhetoric are still significant. These organizations often provided the only "voice" for the Mexican American community. Gutierrez's study is indeed a study of politics--it is particularly effective in its analysis of political strategies and rhetoric. As a social history, it tantalized but left the reader wanting to know more about the ways in which Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants dealt with each other in everyday terms, the ways in which individuals resolved the contradictions and ambiguities in their relationship.

Accompanying the creation of the "new" ethnic group, Mexican Americans, following the mid-nineteenth century war between the United States and Mexico, there emerged a fundamental contradiction which haunts Mexican Americans still and which helped shaped Mexican American/Mexican immigrant relations. While the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) gave Mexican Americans "the rights of citizens," it gave them no way to practice those rights (p. 38). Facing discrimination, violence and on-going economic, political and social subordination, the diverse Mexican population developed a distinct ethnic identity by the 1850s. Ethnic polarization and ethnic discord, two conditions whose roots lie in the 19th century U.S. conquest of Mexico's northern frontier--ethnic polarization and discord--not only helped de-

fine the relationship between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans, but as Mexican immigration grew significantly after 1890, it influenced intra-ethnic relations as well. Whether Mexican Americans perceived the walls between themselves and immigrants--or the mirrors--had much to do with their perceptions of how best to confront the ethnic conflict which was well entrenched before the beginning of any significant Mexican immigration.

Although Gutierrez detects an ambivalence in the relationship between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants during the early period of immigration, 1890-1920, it is during the 1920s and 1930s that a truly polarized view towards Mexican immigration and immigrants emerges within the Mexican American community. As immigration grows in the 1920s, along with an ever-intensifying anti-Mexican sentiment, Mexican Americans divide into two camps. One group, according to Gutierrez, empathizes with immigrants. This group, characterized by Gutierrez as primarily working class, often made up of long-term Mexican residents of the U.S., sees the mirrors rather than the walls. They make the shared experience of discrimination primary in shaping their views of Mexican immigration. The other side, perhaps best exemplified by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), gives primacy to their identity as Americans. As Gutierrez points out, however, even this position is not without its contradictions, its ambivalence. The diversity of Mexican communities in the United States, places where U.S-born Mexicans and Mexican immigrants could and did live side by side, where the two groups were linked by threads of friendship, kinship and work made the ambivalence, and the contradictions, difficult to escape.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, along with the events of the 1940s, including the introduction of the Bracero Program and the attendant increasing undocumented migration, leads to further internal divisions within the Mexican American

community vis-a-vis Mexican immigration. Gutierrez's analysis of these two decades reveals a fascinating interplay of class, ethnicity, nationality and identity. While organizations like the then largely assimilationist-LULAC could call for immigration restriction on the basis that Mexican Texas faced discrimination stemming not from anti-Tejano sentiments, but from anti-immigrant reactions, others like the Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM) could call on both governments to halt the flow of Mexican immigrants while still urging the creation of what Gutierrez calls a "separate, almost autonomous ethnic Mexican community" in the Southwest (p. 104). And, finally, the Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples, founded in 1939, represented yet a third alternative as it urged all ethnic Mexicans, citizen and immigrant alike, to work together, asserting that there was no difference in the conditions faced by the two groups. Any difference was a matter only of degree.

World War II and the subsequent Cold War further influenced Mexican American/ Mexican immigrant relations. Renewed ethnic hostility, as evidenced by California's Sleepy Lagoon case, and the Zoot Suit riots, along with the creation of the Bracero Program which brought thousands of temporary Mexican workers into the United States, and, finally, the sudden growth of undocumented migration resulted in a paradox. In response to these kinds of events, Mexican American organizations like the American G.I. Forum and the National Agricultural Workers Union renewed their support of more restrictive immigration laws and the end of the Bracero Program. At the same time, however, these events also laid the foundation for "more sympathetic attitudes" toward Mexican immigrants (p. 178). By the end of the 1950s, a more sympathetic attitude had taken root as Mexican Americans as well as long-term Mexican residents became the targets of anti-immigrant attitudes and actions (p. 163). In addition, government actions such as Operation Wetback, a massive deportation campaign of the early 1950s,

led some Mexican American organizations, including LULAC and the American GI Forum, to join with the Community Service Organization (CSO) in beginning to talk about immigrant rights.

By the Cold War, the connection between the civil rights of Mexican Americans and the rights of immigrants was evident. This fundamental reassessment, as Gutierrez labels it, on the part of Mexican American organizations led to further changes of attitude among Mexican American organizations in the following decade.

With the emergence of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, a movement asserting cultural and ethnic pride, organizations began an even more serious reassessment of the connections between Mexican "immigration, Chicano ethnicity, and the status of Mexican Americans in the United States" (p. 191). Chicano activists no longer accepted the view, so often a part of earlier Mexican American politics, that undocumented immigrants represented a threat to Mexican Americans. Leading the way was el Centro de Accion Social Autonoma (CASA), established in 1968 to provide services to undocumented immigrants. CASA, with its philosophy that Mexican Americans and Mexicans were a people "sin fronteras" represented the tremendous change. But even moderate Mexican American organizations began to revise their positions by the 1970s. As Congress, the country and the Mexican American community participated in the often-heated debate surrounding immigration issues in the 1970s, organizations with diverse philosophies and ideologies began to adopt the view that what hurt Mexican immigrants could (and often did) hurt Mexican Americans.

Gutierrez marks the First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy, held in San Antonio, Texas in 1977 as "the culmination of nearly a half century of Mexican American debate on Mexican immigration" (p. 202). Drawing together over 2,000 participants from a wide range of organizations and ideolo-

gies, the conference succeeded in showing "unprecedented" unity among Chicano and Mexican American activists. This unity was even more remarkable given the increasing diversity of the population, generationally, politically and ideologically.

Gutierrez ends his study with a thought-provoking "Epilogue" which brings the debate forward to the present-- the role of ethnic political leaders, the debate over controlling the border, the issues surrounding multiculturalism are brought together in these final pages. The rhetoric of the current immigration debate appears unnervingly similar to that of the 1970s, the 1950s, the 1920s, the 1890s. Gutierrez argues that the paradigm put forth by many U.S. politicians--that undocumented immigrants have created this nation's problems--is "fundamentally flawed." Rather than blaming undocumented immigrants, Gutierrez cites the historic and long-time alliance between business and government which has worked to "ensure the flow of immigrant workers...for the maximum benefit of American businesses and consumers" (p. 211). Calling on Americans to take responsibility for their own actions, Gutierrez in many ways echoes the views of those organizations which saw the situation of Mexican Americans mirrored in the conditions of Mexican immigrants. In the end, however, the ambiguity and the contradictions remain in the relationship between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. Far from being resolved, Gutierrez argues, Mexican Americans continue to find themselves "compel[led]...to make decisions about who they are, how they want to be perceived by others, and who they want to be as citizens of this society" (p. 216). At a time when the debates over immigration, ethnicity, and multiculturalism fill the airwaves, the television newscasts, and newspaper columns, Gutierrez presents an informative, provocative and extremely well-researched study of intra-ethnic relations in the Mexican American community, a study of the walls and mirrors be-

tween Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.

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