

BOOK REVIEWS

LOUIS G. MENDOZA. *Conversations Across Our America: Talking about Immigration and the Latinoization of the United States.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012). x, 299 pp., \$24.95 cloth.

Louis G. Mendoza's book, *Conversations Across Our America: Talking about Immigration and the Latinoization of the United States*, incorporates thirty-three conversations with forty-two Latinas/os of various nationalities in order to better understand the Latino influence in the United States. To collect this data, Mendoza rode a bicycle approximately 8,500 miles through thirty states from July to December 2007. He draws upon Ethnic Studies tradition as he was driven to conduct research that is relevant to his community. Mendoza draws upon the oral histories and lived experience of his participants to demonstrate the diverse nature of Latinas/os throughout the country. He presents what Pérez-Huber (2009) defines as *testimonios* – “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 644).

In the introductory chapter, Mendoza presents his pathway to this study and his desire for challenging the narrow framing of Latina/o immigration by the media, which commonly shapes public perception. Each remaining chapter engages a primary theme that emerged from his interviews. Chapters grapple with how Latinas/os navigate notions of “home” and politics of belonging in their new geography. Testimonies reveal that participants have been witnesses to change across generations as well as agents of change in the pursuit of social justice. To do this, Latinas/os rely upon cultivating a sense of reciprocity and equity in order to bridge differences with majority populations. In addition, chapters expose the anti-immigrant sentiment that Latina/o communities face and the strategies they employ to assert their civil and human rights in the face of such barriers. Participant narratives also demonstrate the internal migration that takes place within the United States and the increasingly complex dynamics occurring along the U.S.-Mexico border region.

The emphasis on the work of community leaders and activists for social change positions this text as a potential guidebook of a national network of immigrant rights activists. Readers could use this text to identify a contact prior to traveling to any of the regions featured and/or to organize collective action across regional boundaries. Mendoza describes the unique nature of his participants' work as he writes,

They were driven by their everyday life circumstances and experiences – as workers, immigrants, children of immigrants, and descendants of Mexican settlers who arrived before the establishment of the U.S., and students – across generations and geography to acquire the needed knowledge base and the organizing and speaking skills to be effective activists and advocates. In this way, they are quintessential practitioners of cultural citizenship who seek to advance community well-being by advocating for social and institutional reforms through formal and informal means (p. 5).

Conversations Across Our America would be strengthened by an elaboration of the themes identified by Mendoza. While he presents a brief background at the start of each thematic chapter, the reader is left with the task of identifying the thematic pattern across participants' narratives. Further, there are no concluding thoughts offered by Mendoza at the end of each chapter. As a result, the rich narratives presented by the study's participants are lacking analysis. While Mendoza organized the pieces thematically, the connections across narratives are difficult to decipher. Had he proffered an analysis of the narratives, readers could better identify further social forces that shape the lives of the study participants, such as assimilation, residential segregation, gentrification, police brutality, social class differences, and youth empowerment, to name a few. Analyzing these narratives would be possible by comparing the experiences of participants to each other's and/or to those in existing literature on the immigrant experience across generations (Jimenez 2010; Ochoa 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Vasquez 2011). Engagement with existing literature would also allow the reader to situate this project within a larger context of scholarly efforts to understand immigration and the Latina/o experience in the United States.

In his conclusion, Mendoza identifies the important role of local leadership in determining a community's reputation as inclusive or exclusive and states, ". . . communities that strive to be inclusive by respecting and embracing diversity have adopted a moral and ethical framework that views others as whole human beings with distinct histories, values, and qualities that complement their own and enrich their lives – not threaten it" (p. 278). Mendoza could use these important insights to develop and offer policy recommendations, which would strengthen his concluding chapter. This text would be appropriate for courses in Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Politics, and others that explore the Latina/o experience, im/migration and demography, and race relations in the United States. It would be beneficial for both undergraduate and graduate students to read in order to better grasp the shifting

demographics of the United States and the unique experience of Latinas/os.

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REFERENCES

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MARK RIFKIN. *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 440 pp., \$99 (cloth), \$35 (paper).

Mark Rifkin's second monograph, *When Did Indians Become Straight*, is an intellectually rigorous and theoretically dense work that explores the relationship between Indigenous political formations and heteronormativity by presenting a literary history of sexuality that spans the last two centuries. Rifkin argues that the settler state's investment in, and enforcement of, heterosexuality as the basic organizing structure of society is a response to the fact that "Indigeneity puts the state in crisis by raising fundamental questions about the legitimacy of its (continued) existence" (37). As a result, Indigenous geopolitical alliances that exceed liberal state logics of what counts as "proper governance" are interpellated as "aberrant or anomalous modes of (failed) domesticity" in an political economy of privatization, where heterosexual coupling is portrayed as a natural expression of "the family" (37). Rifkin demonstrates that "heteroconjugality" is the condition of possibility for political