

BOOK REVIEWS

Marc S. Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism & Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Marc S. Rodriguez has written an important book on the Chicano Movement in Texas and Wisconsin. It is a study of what he calls the “Tejano Diaspora,” the dispersion of Mexican Americans from Texas to the rest of the country during the 1960s and 1970s. This movement of people had its origins in the annual migration of farm workers from their South Texas homes to find employment in the north and west that eventually resulted in the permanent dispersion of nearly two hundred thousand farmworkers from South Texas (3). Rodriguez wants to understand the political ramifications of this movement especially the way that community and labor union activists expanded their ideological and political repertoire utilizing what he calls a “unique translocal stage.” The result is an analysis of the Chicano Movement and farm labor organizing that enriches our understanding of the era and Mexican American history.

Rodriguez begins by examining the first attempts to overthrow an Anglo mayor and city council in Crystal City, Texas. The struggle for equal civil rights in this small Texas town will be familiar to historians and social scientists. Entrenched minority Anglo regimes in South Texas dominated local politics and the economy and almost every other aspect of social life in town. The 1963 uprising in Crystal City marked the beginning of a larger political transformation that broke the region’s semi feudal politics and an era of greater racial representation in the state as a whole. He takes the reader through the rise of La Raza Unida Party in the early 1960s to its disintegration in the late 1970s. Rodriguez breaks new ground by documenting the working relationship between South Texas and Wisconsin activism, unexplored facet of the Chicano Movement. The Mexican American population in Wisconsin grew via these Texas migrants but also changed the nature of community politics, most notably the creation of a new labor union, Obreros Unidos. In turn, some of the union’s founders returned to South Texas and became key players in the rise of La Raza Unida Party.

Rodriguez paints a compelling picture of interconnected Tejano activism in two states, each with its own dynamics and outcomes. The circulation of activists between Texas and Wisconsin sheds new light on Mexican American politics in states outside of the southwest. It is a little known precedent to contemporary Mexican American migration to non-traditional ‘frontier’ states. Similarly, Rodriguez contributes to the revisionist literature on Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union. As in California, Wisconsin farm workers

organized in the fields against tremendous odds but they also had to contend with the internal politics of the national union and sometimes ran afoul of Chavez's demand for centralized control.

Rodriguez has much to offer and correctly draws our attention to the strong links between Mexican American leaders in Wisconsin and Texas but his admiration for their work often results in hyperbole and broad generalizations. His claims about the importance of a trans state connection are well taken but, at the same time, it is not surprising that activists travel, maintain contacts with one another, or build networks with other organizations and leaders. Rodriguez should have devoted more space to setting the context within which this new wave of political work took place. More weight should have been placed on the alliances they built with student activists, church groups, labor unions, and Wisconsin progressives. The reason so many Texas migrants settled out of the migrant stream and sought work in Wisconsin factories was because southern agriculture became increasingly mechanized and less dependent on manual labor. Likewise, the prospects for Mexican American empowerment during this period were profoundly influenced by developments that receive little attention: the termination of the Bracero Program, liberalization of the Democratic Party politics, the Voting Rights Act, and a slow but steady rise in the number of minority elected officials. Despite these omissions, the Tejano Diaspora is a welcome addition to the literature on contemporary Mexican American history.

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A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein, eds., *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

In the United States, paeans to the middle class are as clichéd as barbeques and stump speeches. Politicians' obsession with the middle class derives in part from the broadness of the phrase and the wide swath of the electorate that identifies itself as middle class regardless of income, profession, or property. Candidates know that targeting middle-class voters is the core of electioneering, even if no one is quite sure what the middle class is or what it believes. Unlike American politicians, however, historians have been reluctant to use terms like "middle class," precisely because of scholarly unease regarding its definition.

In this path-breaking work, a range of historians tackle not only the meaning of the phrase, but also the ways in which the middle class has evolved in countries around the world from the mid-nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries. Explicitly challenging the scholarly assumption that middle-class formation happened first in England and America and then spread out over the