

*Proleterians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933*, by Zaragoza Vargas. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. xv, 277 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY F. ARTURO ROSALES, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Many of my students are surprised to learn that there are almost as many Mexicans in Chicago as in our state of Arizona. Zaragoza Vargas, like others before him, demonstrates that the Mexican-American heritage is deeply rooted in the Midwest. His work also makes the most comprehensive statement to date on the history of Mexican industrial workers in the U.S. North. It synthesizes old ideas and breaks some theoretical ground by challenging the tendency to see Mexican immigrants as hapless victims. Historians of victimization, Vargas explains, "tend to describe the exploited workers who toiled for low wages and were burdened with the problem of work-place discrimination" (9)—that is, manipulated victims rather than willing workers who followed their own inclinations.

Vargas's subjects emigrated when their future trajectory seemed as secure as possible—when they knew what was in store across the border and had sufficient capital and connections to friends and relatives at the destination point. To use the current vogue term, these migrants had "agency." According to Vargas, immigrants were attracted to unfamiliar northern terrain by high wages and the allure of technology. Getting there was a gauntlet run. With their eye on the prize, they endured repressive conditions in Texas, purged time on railroads, meatpacking plants, and sugar beet harvesting.

In addition, Vargas draws an intricate portrait of the dynamics of job mobility and community life within a context of immigrant expectations. Workers sought jobs primarily in either steel or automotive plants. Not everyone made it, but those who did guarded their jobs jealously in spite of harsh working conditions. In the meantime, they established *colonias*, primarily in the Detroit and Chicago areas, with a degree of institutional completeness. Vargas carefully delineates everyday life issues of work and recreation through a lucid and well-crafted narrative. Unfortunately, the Great Depression curtailed continued evolution of these communities. Unemployment and repatriation not only reduced their size but wracked the institutions established during the years of prosperity.

Vargas used an impressive array of sources to produce this work. For areas outside of Detroit, the study relies largely on secondary sources. His account of Mexicans in Detroit, however, taps employment records as well as a dazzling display of other local sources.

But as have most other Mexican immigrant studies of this period, the inquiry neglects a rich trove of Mexican government accounts located in archives in Mexico City.

While the monograph is indeed more exhaustive than any other work on this subject, promises of a novel theoretical approach do not quite materialize. Agency, for example, is present in previous studies—it was just not given that label. The book also leaves crucial questions unanswered. It seems that many Mexicans who wound up in Detroit could not bypass Texas fast enough. This was true for west central Mexicans, but it did not necessarily apply to immigrants from Mexico's northeast. Why would these latter not be as attracted by the industrial allures of technological prestige and higher wages? Could it be that Mexican northerners eschewed midwestern *colonias* in favor of Texas because they found the Midwest as uninviting as central Mexicans found the Southwest? After all, the industrial Midwest contained unfamiliar ecological and cultural arrangements, rampant unemployment, brutal police, and more intensive challenges to family cohesion. In many ways this explains why immigrant nationalism was more intense in the Midwest than in older communities of the Southwest. I suspect that there are more profound structural reasons for choice of destination than the pull factors described in this book.

*Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945*, by Robert L. Dorman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. xiv, 366 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL H. BORUS, UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Little recognized today, the diverse movement known as regionalism was in its heyday between the world wars a dominant feature of the American cultural landscape. It tenuously linked such different tendencies as the California socialism of Carey McWilliams and the Tennessee agrarianism of Donald Davidson through its indictment of modernity as excessively instrumental, anomically rootless, and blandly homogeneous. Part aesthetic program, part social science, regionalism took its stand in the defense of organic communities defined by environment, common custom, and history at the moment when they seemed most imperiled by the capitalist reorganization of the countryside. Aiming to create a culture that meaningfully combined high ideals and humbler practices, regionalists put their hopes in the ability of the folk to combat the spreading malaise.

In contrast to the airy unrealities of genteel culture and the degraded numbness of mass culture, the regionalist notion of aesthetic

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