

# Reviews

## **La migración y los latinos en Estados Unidos.**

### **Visiones y conexiones**

(Migration and Latinos in the United States:  
Perspectives and Connections)

*Elaine Levine, editor*

CISAN-UNAM

Mexico City, 2008, 445 pp.

Latinos have become the largest minority group in the United States, representing 15 percent of the country's total population, and of this group 60 percent are Mexicans. The process of migration to the United States has diverse causes and consequences in both communities of origin and destination. Topics such as the social construction of the Latino identity and specific contexts of economic, political, social and cultural life for Latinos in the United States, as well as different processes of migration are constantly generating new perspectives and studies to better understand this phenomenon.

A new book with this interest in mind is *La migración y los latinos en Estados Unidos, visiones y conexiones* (Migration and Latinos in the United States: Perspectives and Connections), edited by Elaine Levine. The nineteen chapters organized into five sections offer theoretical analysis, new knowledge, perspectives, examples and empirical cases from some of the processes occurring from the moment migrants start their journey to arrival at their destination, and their role in the social transformations developing in the places where they interact. The chapters address Latin American migration in a multi- and interdisciplinary manner, using diverse methodologies and

theories, and aimed at clarifying the links and interactions between places of origin and destination.

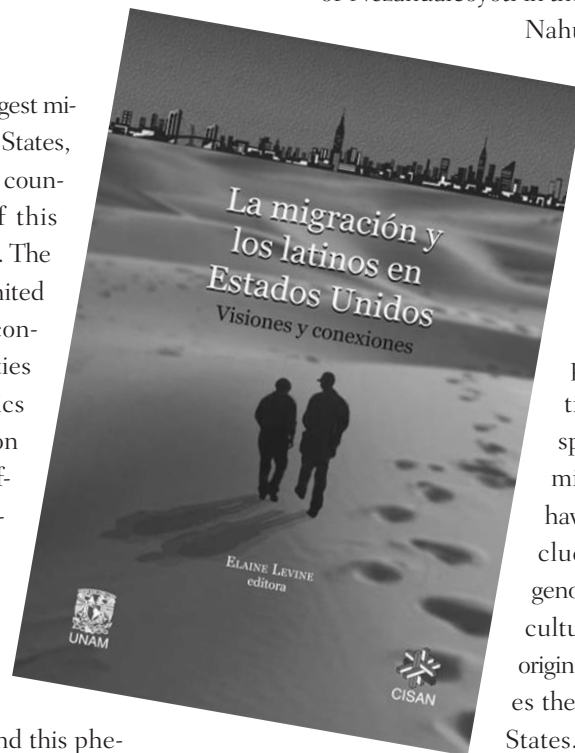
In the book's first section, the authors analyze some of the migration processes and circuits in Mexico: cases of Oaxacan migrants; the migration route of inhabitants of Nezhualcóyotl in the state of Mexico to New York; the

Nahuas who migrate to Los Angeles

and Houston; and the migration of Veracruz inhabitants.

These chapters reveal how identity is formed in the specific historic and social contexts in the places where migrants originate, but also in the places where they arrive. The authors also explore the conception of the migration circuit as the connecting of spaces linked together not only by migrants, but also by people who have never migrated. The section includes discussion on the way indigenous migration contributes to socio-cultural reconfigurations in places of origin and destination, and how it enriches the profiles of Latinos in the United States.

The second part describes perceptions of migration and migrants in Mexico. Two studies, one by Cecilia Ímaz and the other by Jorge Mercado, reveal the ways in which perceptions of migration changed in Mexico beginning in the 1970s, and how during the Vicente Fox administration, migrants were no longer described as deserters or traitors to their homeland, but as national heroes. Remittances were the main reason for this new perception, however this change in the migrant's image does not resolve the economic and social conditions generated by migration, and actually conceals its social and economic costs. In addition, Mercado analyzes the perceptions of migrants in their communities of ori-



gin, as well as the possible relationship between migration and violence, explored through opinions expressed by inhabitants of Apatzingán, Michoacán, and Fresnillo, Zacatecas. Mercado writes that while violence has multiple causes, the population remaining in these communities reports that it is actually a cause of migration. The author concludes that while international migration in the communities studied has had a strong impact on family and community structure, the effects have been especially negative in the cultural sphere.

The third section of the book is a kaleidoscope that attempts to untangle the complex interrelationships between the U.S. labor market and society. It includes five studies addressing issues like the insertion of Latinos into the U.S. work force, and revealing that Mexicans born outside the United States have the lowest educational levels and the biggest disadvantages on the job, while receiving the lowest wages. We learn that this tendency is more likely when migrants do not have English skills, are not citizens, and in many cases, do not have work permits.

One very interesting thing is that, according to these studies, these labor disadvantages have been motivated to some degree by migrants' low self-esteem, encouraged by the climate of discrimination against a considerable sector of Latinos. The authors propose reflecting upon the lack of the educational, housing and health services for this population needed to overcome disadvantages. And they suggest that if this situation is not resolved, it could affect the development of U.S. society.

Another perspective included in this section is that migrants contribute something more than labor to U.S. society. They enrich the communities where they live with their music, cuisine, businesses, skills and traditions, and they bring hope to communities that have been abandoned by people of U.S. origin. Examples can be found in Iowa and other states in the Midwest, in places where the majority of the population is elderly and young people are needed to keep schools, businesses and rural communities running.

The fourth section presents intense, revealing analysis on the educational experiences of migrants' sons and daughters. The authors view the level of schooling of young Latinos as indicators of their job and wage potential, and the results are not very encouraging.

The possibilities for children of poor migrant workers to surpass their parents' socioeconomic level are minimal. Young Mexicans face many barriers to remaining in school, and the authors highlight four factors that contribute the most to poor school performance: their age when arriving and entering school; their family situations; individual experiences in school; and whether or not they have immigration documents.

The fifth section invites the reader to reflect upon the construction of the Latino identity, migration policies and political participation by migrants. This series of studies is especially interesting, since it also discusses the origins and development of the Chicano movement. An innovative methodology known as "cybertestimony" is used to provide some examples of experiences and types of reasoning that figure into the multiple identities of Latinos in the United States. And it is pointed out that the only important element in relation to this minority's identity is U.S. society's perception, that they, like all Latinos, are not part of it and therefore do not belong there. This section also proposes that migrants contribute to redefining the meaning of being a "citizen"—with an understanding that goes beyond legal questions and the Latino identity—as an individual with the right to belong, based on his or her experience in that country.

Elaine Levine's work clearly inspires reflection on the impact of Latinos on the society, economy, culture and politics in migrants' communities of origin and destination. The book she has edited is based on an exhaustive study of the literature on this topic, lending a documentary quality that will be of great interest for anyone wishing to benefit from a comprehensive, dynamic viewpoint. The conclusions at the end of each chapter point to the need for the U.S. government to pay more attention to migration, and the urgent need for greater cooperation with governments of the countries of origin. ■■■

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