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Book Reviews

Alejandra Marchevsky
California State University, Los Angeles

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The Right to Stay Home: How U.S. Policy Drives Mexican Migration

BY DAVID BACON. BOSTON: BEACON PRESS, 2013. 328 PP. ISBN 978-0807001615

Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas

BY DAVID SCOTT FITZGERALD AND DAVID COOK-MARTÍN. CAMBRIDGE: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014. 512 PP. ISBN 978-0674729049

The mass movement of people around the Americas has been critical to racialized nation building since the 18th century, and has simultaneously produced transnational spaces of social and economic integration and state violence. These themes spring from David Bacon's sweeping account of contemporary Mexican migration in *The Right to Stay Home: How U.S. Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Beacon, 2013), and David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martín's historical-sociological book, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (Harvard UP, 2014).

Bacon's book foregrounds an argument that the prolific journalist and immigrant rights activists have advanced for years: The U.S. is not an unwitting recipient of Mexican immigration; instead, it is swallowing up Mexico's human and natural resources, and has imposed neoliberal policies that have contributed to skyrocketing unemployment and poverty in Mexico. This has left millions of displaced poor Mexicans no choice but to migrate north. Bacon documents in exquisite prose how Mexico's "great migration"—which peaked at 12.67 million Mexicans in the U.S. in 2008—was propelled by U.S. policies, especially the North American Free Trade Agreement. This epic exodus is explained through exhaustive details on the assault on Mexican workers. On the heels of NAFTA, Granjas Carroll, a subsidiary of Virginia-based meatpacking giant Smithfield Foods, displaced Veracruz agricultural workers who then migrated to the U.S. for the same type of jobs they had lost at home. Thanks to liberalized foreign investment and trade rules, Smithfield flooded Mexico with cheap, imported pork, and erected massive hog farms in Veracruz's Perote Valley, bankrupting Mexican pork producers. Representatives from Granjas Carroll and municipal officials promised

valley residents "modernization" and jobs. And yet, the few jobs that materialized locked workers out of corporate profit-sharing and extracted 12-hour workdays for as little as \$55/week (9). Most Veracruz emigrants settled in U.S. agricultural towns like Tar Heel, North Carolina, where Smithfield employs mostly undocumented Mexican immigrants in the world's largest slaughterhouse, and the tobacco industry imports H2A visa guest workers and undocumented workers from Veracruz to labor under some of the worst conditions in the country.

The story of displacement repeats in Oaxaca, where the federal government transferred communal lands (*ejidos*) to multinational mining conglomerates. When residents protested land loss and ecological damage from industrial mining, foreign companies cynically offered them free toilets, and local police descended on demonstrators with dogs and guns (50). Home to 20 percent of Mexico's indigenous population, Oaxaca has seen most of its young residents leave for work in other parts of Mexico and the U.S.: nearly half of its rural communities had negative growth between 1990 and 2000 (57).

Bacon argues that capitalists and political elites from both nation-states have spurred migration through their destructive policies. Next, U.S. policymakers have created "illegal" people through laws that racialize and criminalize Mexican immigrants, an effect that produces vulnerable workers for U.S. employers. The second half of the book recounts the repression of Mexican immigrants through the buildup of border and interior enforcement, and the expansion of the immigration detention system. *The Right to Stay Home* centers the voices of activists with selected *testimonios* that follow each chapter: In Mississippi, Latino immigrants and the state's legislative Black Caucus united to block anti-immigration bills that had swept legislatures in other southern states; in Los Angeles,

Latino janitors protested “silent raids” and mass firings of undocumented workers by Able Building Maintenance. The title for Bacon’s book comes from the visionary group, Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB), whose organizing of transnational Oaxacan communities explicitly connects community-based development and political reform in Oaxaca to indigenous immigrant struggles in the U.S. As Bacon proposes, “the right not to migrate is not so much an idea as a movement of people [...] It is a call for the right to an alternative course of economic development that makes migration truly a voluntary choice, rather than one brought about by the need to survive” (262).

These “voices from below” are missing from FitzGerald and Cook-Martín’s panoramic study of race and immigration policy in six American countries—the U.S., Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina (with a hefty appendix that surveys ethnic selection policies in another sixteen). Social activists and immigrants rarely speak in this book, which is dominated by the voices of political and intellectual elites who grapple with principles of liberalism and democracy relative to national identity, racial ideology, economic development, and their country’s foreign interests and global stature. In contrast to Bacon’s dialectical approach (where elites face off with social activists and immigrants), FitzGerald and Cook-Martín present a more complex theory of political power and immigration policy as produced by shifting dynamics within and between two planes: the “vertical dimension,” which involves political and intellectual elites, capitalist interests, and popular classes within the country; and the “horizontal dimension,” encompassing inter-state relations, transnational networks of scientists and diplomats, and international organizations and laws. *Culling the Masses* argues that racism sprung from liberal philosophy in the Americas as elites selectively cast racialized immigrants as incapable of democratic self-rule. It also dismantles the myth that “Western democracy” and the Global North led racial progress in the 20th century.

Part of a new wave of scholarship that focuses on migration to the Global South, they dispute hegemonic views of an underdeveloped emigrant-sending Latin America, as well as the erasure of ethnic minorities within Latin-American discourses of national identity and *mestizaje*. Unlike Bacon’s premise, where capitalists usually win, FitzGerald and Cook-Martín’s research shows that racial ideologies, transnational epistemic communities,

and foreign policy interests often trumped capitalist demands for foreign-born labor. Whereas 19th century Latin-American political and intellectual elites promoted European immigration to “whiten” the population, and opposed the importation of black and Chinese workers, a new crop of populist leaders in Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil in the early-to-mid 20th century challenged biological racism with what FitzGerald and Cook-Martín call a “racist anti-racism” that cast Chinese, Gypsies, and Jews as culturally unassimilable to their “national character.”

Immigration politics shifted again after World War II, when anti-racist discourse and the embrace of racially neutral immigration policies brought international caché to Latin-American nations, especially through their participation in Inter-American conferences on human rights and global organizations like UNESCO. Yet, as the authors take pains to document, most Latin-American governments outwardly opposed racist policy but used secret policies and consular practices to continue to positively select desired ethnic groups and exclude undesirable populations. The book offers a tempered assessment of racial progress, illustrating how formal equality and democracy do not guarantee justice.

While *The Right to Stay Home* and *Culling the Masses* are attuned to the economic and racial dynamics that animate transnational migration and immigration policy, they overlook gender and sexuality. Bacon’s book would benefit from a consideration of the vast body of research on gender and Mexican migration, from historical analyses of discourses of masculinity and modernization in the Bracero Program, to contemporary work on Mexican women’s and queer immigrants’ experiences of gendered and sexual violence. Similarly, gender and sexuality are notably under-theorized in FitzGerald and Cook-Martín’s analysis of immigration policy as it connects with population control efforts. Feminist and queer studies have extensively documented the gender and sexual ideologies behind reproductive control technologies as they intersect with race and class, and inform both racially selective and racially neutral immigration laws. If we are to offer relevant, incisive social commentary, 21st-century migration scholars and immigrant rights movements must be grounded in a thoroughly intersectional framework.

Alejandra Marchevsky

California State University, Los Angeles