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Book Reviews

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How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts

BY NATALIA MOLINA. BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2014. 232 PP.
ISBN 978-0520280083

Reframing the Latino Immigration Debate: Towards a Humanistic Paradigm

BY ALVARO HUERTA. PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTONIO TUROK. SAN DIEGO: SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS,
2013. 72 PP. ISBN 978-1938537035

The pervading belief that the United States is a nation of immigrants has produced some misleading conclusions. For instance, it has generated an unwitting belief in democracy's unmitigated commitment to diversity and inclusivity. The two books under review unsettle this understanding. They argue that U.S. immigration policies, rather than charting the nation's unwavering adherence to egalitarian principles, make known its racial, gendered, and national preferences along with its compliance with the demands of capitalist growth. Inclusion and diversity are, in this view, the contested values of the nation and not the crowning features of American exceptionalism.

In *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, historian Natalia Molina convincingly details how the growth of the immigration regime from 1924 to 1965 is intricately bound to popular and legal understandings of race in the U.S. While many scholars have tackled this issue, Molina offers a fresh approach. Instead of examining the ways in which immigration laws are largely designed to target a specific group for exclusion, Molina advances the notion of "racial scripts" to call attention to how the exclusion of one racial group develops a racial logic that could be later accessed to justify the exclusion of other nonwhite groups. Employing this conceptual framework, Molina connects the history of Mexican immigration to the broader U.S. immigration history. For Molina, the period between when immigration restriction was at its height in 1924 to when immigration policies liberalized in 1965 deserves special attention, given the wide-ranging debates that took place over race and the right to citizenship. Molina thus centers her study on examining how the

racial logic used to deny one nonwhite group the right to citizenship has affected the status of other nonwhite groups and especially Mexicans in the U.S.

In part one of her study, Molina develops in three chapters a thoughtful analysis of how the perceived racial ambiguity of Mexicans in the U.S. shaped the efforts of local campaigns to deny to Mexicans citizenship by naturalization and birthright citizenship. Not only were Mexicans in the U.S. racialized as "birds of passage" (38) or sojourners who were expected to contribute to the economic development of the U.S. but remain socially and culturally marginal, but they were also legally classified as "white" even as popular designations had cast Mexicans as "nonwhite." Considering how the legal requirements for naturalized citizenship contained a racial qualification of whites-only until 1952, the supposed racial ambiguity of Mexicans, as Molina shows, made them susceptible to questions over whether they were racially qualified for naturalized citizenship, even as the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had legally classified them as white. Unlike European immigrants, Mexicans were not widely assumed to be "whites on arrival." While earlier court rulings upheld the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Molina details how the Great Depression reinstated efforts to disenfranchise Mexicans in the U.S. Federal judges in California and Texas drew on the "one-drop rule" of black racial classification to make Mexicans ineligible for naturalization, arguing that Mexicans, with strains of Indian blood, were nonwhite. Legal questions over the racial classification of Mexicans ended with the 1940 Nationality Act, which extended naturalized citizenship to indigenous races in the Western Hemisphere. But for Molina, the inconsistencies in federal court rulings were

important to documenting the historic link between race and citizenship and how strategies developed to disenfranchise blacks were similarly employed to exclude Mexicans.

Notably, Molina's attention to the ways in which race shaped the right to citizenship includes a discussion of the making of the white ideal. This involves not only examining the oft-cited *Ozawa* and *Thind* cases but more important, it entails a look at birthright citizenship. Specifically, Molina interrogates why for certain groups birthright citizenship is not an assumed protection but one that needed to be verified by the courts and the passage of laws. Molina details the 1898 landmark Supreme Court case, *Wong Kim Ark*, to show how the Chinese fought a separate legal battle to have access to birthright citizenship. She also highlights how women finally gained the right in 1931 to retain their American citizenship after marrying aliens who were ineligible for citizenship. For Molina, these cases revealed how the white ideal governed the seemingly universal protection of birthright citizenship and how this ideal was sustained through the regulation of female sexuality. Molina further develops this context to explain why birthright citizenship remains tenuous today. As she details, opponents of birthright citizenship are looking to disenfranchise Mexicans in the U.S. This campaign not only targets nonwhite children of alien parents, but it also advances a stigma that has historically racialized Mexican women for possessing an overabundant reproductive capacity.

Molina dedicates the second part of her study and its remaining chapters to examining how race governed the U.S. immigration regime through deportations. To that end, she details the mechanisms through which Mexican labor activists and workers were made deportable. Reminiscent of her 2006 study, Molina recounts the 1940 arrests of Mexican labor activists by the U.S. Border Patrol agents of California's Imperial Valley who had acted on behalf of an anti-union growers association. The workers were charged with being "afflicted with loathsome and dangerous contagious diseases" that made them likely to become public charges, which were grounds for deportation. As this type of medical racialization was successful in deporting the Mexican workers, Molina shows the process by which one could lose their citizenship and how one's race and political activities influenced that decision. Finally, Molina turns her attention to Operation Wetback to explore how the 1950s campaign to rid the nation of

undocumented immigrants was played out in Southern California. Beyond showing the interconnectedness of race and the immigration regime, she details the activities of the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born and the development of coalitional politics that cut across racial and ethnic lines in the fight for immigrant rights. In so doing, she builds on the greatest strength of her book and connects Mexican immigration history to the broader U.S. immigration history.

As Alvaro Huerta underscores in *Reframing the Latino Immigration Debate: Towards a Humanistic Paradigm*, the nation is currently engaged in an immigration debate that in many ways is a continuation of the campaigns that Molina details in her book. Huerta thus commits his study, which is an assemblage of essays, concisely written, interspersed with photographs by Antonio Turok, to challenge the pejorative views that mainstream Americans hold against immigrants and Mexican immigrants, in particular. Huerta penned the majority of the essays in 2011 and while many of the pieces address general concerns about the current immigration debate, others are written as a direct challenge to the restrictive immigration bills that were introduced in Arizona and Alabama. A common theme that runs through this collection of essays is the importance of recognizing Mexican immigrants as hard working laborers who have sacrificed much to build a life in the U.S. This image is both near and dear to Huerta as he often recounts how he grew up watching his dad work a series of minimum wage jobs while his mom put in long hours, with an equally long commute, working as a domestic worker in order to make ends meet. Huerta thus writes in a heartfelt manner appealing to readers to see how Mexican immigrants are like other hardworking Americans instead of the disparaging portraits that xenophobic pundits have painted. The call to see the worth of those who are "on the bottom" (15) of this country thereby forms the basis of what Huerta calls a humanistic paradigm to the immigration debate. Like Molina, Huerta writes to challenge the racial bias that has worked to compromise the sense of belonging of racialized people in the U.S.

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