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## Book Review: At the Core and in the Margins: Incorporation of Mexican Immigrants in Two Rural Midwestern Communities

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**Book Review****At the Core and in the Margins: Incorporation of Mexican Immigrants in Two Rural  
Midwestern Communities**

Julia Albarracin

2016

East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press

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The United States is known to be a nation of immigrants. A recent analysis under the auspices of the Center for Immigration studies underscores America's history with immigrants revealing some interesting immigration trends dating back to the 1900s (Camarota & Zeigler, 2016). While the number of immigrants today surpasses the numbers in the past 94 years, what is also unique is the shift in immigrant residence away from traditionally populated states. The top six states including states like California and Texas have seen a gradual decrease in immigrant settlement in the past more than two decades; while nine other states have seen an unprecedented increase, more than twice the national average (Camarota & Zeigler, 2016). Five of these nine states have the largest rural populations (Rurality in the United States, 2011). While a dramatic increase in immigrants from countries like Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and Ethiopia is evident in recent years, Mexico still tops the list of sending countries. The focus of Julia Albarracin's book is Mexican immigrants in two of these new rural destinations in West central Illinois, specifically Beardstown and Monmouth. This book in paperback, is the product of an in-depth study of these immigrants through surveys and interviews to know about their unique experiences as they settled into these communities which lacked exposure to immigrants.

Dr. Julia Albarracin is Dan and Laura Webb Professor of Political Science at Western Illinois University. This book is also her contribution to the Latinos in United States Series developed by the Michigan State University Press. It is the seventh in the eight-series book collection, contributing to the knowledge of socio-political, cultural and economic experiences of Latinos in the United States. The book is divided into six chapters with the introductory chapter and the conclusion chronicled as separate chapters. The author shares the survey instrument and tables comparing the demographic characteristics of Mexican immigrants in Central Illinois and a national Pew sample, in appendices 1 and 2 (p.129-141). These are followed by chapter-wise notes (p.143-150), a list of references and an alphabetical index respectively. A list of figures and tables are included in the beginning along with a table of contents and a foreword.

The author investigates this new trend in Mexican immigrant 'Incorporation' defined as "gaining a position in society that is secure" (p.xxiii), intrigued by the dramatic increase (2000-2010) in this population in the two rural towns. Eighty miles apart, these towns of Beardstown and Monmouth with populations less than 10,000, have seen a two to three-fold increase in

Mexican residents respectively. In the introductory chapter, besides presenting the rationale for the study, the possible reasons for this demographic shift are explored as well. The author also dedicates substantial content to conceptualizing the dimensions of 'incorporation' (legal, cultural and political) and incorporation as process, presenting it as a modified version of the stages of assimilation developed by Park and Burgess (p.xxxiii). In doing so she revisits the experiences of incoming immigrants in general and specifically the current political and socio-economic context that may shape a varied assimilation path. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the mixed-method data collection process (n=260).

Chapter 1 examines through available data the Latino population distribution in Illinois, narrowing down to the predominant Mexican residents in selected small counties including the two towns in focus. Some inferences are drawn on the factors precipitating and conducive to rural residence for the immigrants in both towns along with drawing some comparisons between them as well. An interesting finding is the response of the communities to these residents through the inclusion of bilingual programs in the schools even at the kindergarten level and in churches. The towns were not devoid of discrimination however. An additional exercise the author undertakes is comparing sample demographic characteristics with national level Pew data on Mexican immigrants revealing both similarities and differences.

The first of the three dimensions of incorporation namely legal incorporation is the narrative in Chapter 2. A very concise historical description of how immigration policies evolved in this country with an exclusive on immigration from Mexico create the backdrop for the influence of rules of admission on how immigrants are eventually able to settle down. Albarracin has also given specific attention to current policies particularly DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans) that may favor these immigrants; besides also addressing how enforcement against undocumented workers and illegal entry at federal and local levels has played out. Thus, sensitive to their uncertain legal (documentation) status her research questions addressed citizenship status and plans for citizenship to avoid any sense of threat. In her in-depth interviews, she delves into the arduous, dangerous journeys undertaken by many of the immigrants, prolonged separation from families and the risky process of acquiring documentation. While the meatpacking industry is the breadwinner for many in these rural destinations, employers seldom confront or assist in legalization. With only 9.4% of the sample having attained citizenship, an analysis of factors influencing an active pursuit of citizenship reveals English language skills and higher income to be key determinants.

The third and fourth chapters complement each other addressing immigrants' cultural integration and receptivity experienced, respectively. Chapter 3 on cultural incorporation details the observations about the two groups of immigrants with respect to their level of cultural integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization in balancing their cultures of origin and settlement. An overall inclination and effort to acquire language skills was evident. The bond created by common challenges enhanced social connectedness among the Latinos as compared to their limited contacts with host community Anglos. The inference drawn is they hold mixed attitudes with the host community, placing them in the conflict/ negotiation stage of incorporation with better educated Latinos having more favorable interactions. Chapter 4 offers extensive personal accounts of discrimination experienced by immigrants in both towns especially Beardstown (a sundown town) from police, bosses at work and Anglo residents, at stores,

restaurants, with housing, health care and even schools. The author draws attention to modern or subtle racism where existence of racism is denied, minority group demands and special policies favoring them are abhorred. Favoritism towards native whites, overworking of Latinos were manifestations of discrimination in meatpacking workplaces while the highest instances of discrimination in both towns involved the police and their scrutiny of legal status in the most unlikely of situations. Thus, almost half of the sample reported experiencing discrimination.

The last two chapters (5 & 6) address political incorporation of the immigrants. This is gauged by participation in church/religious activities, volunteering one's time socially or politically, representing one's ethnic group, attending a public meeting, contributing to a political campaign, registering to vote or casting one's vote. Overall the evidence indicated positive attitudes with participation in social activities being higher than political participation determined in part by education, social class and undocumented status. Another indicator of political incorporation the author investigates is trust in the government since it influences participation. Based on examining predictor variables like social class, education, length of stay in the country, and gender, a regression analysis found that higher levels of income and education and longer stay predicted less trust in the government. A favorable attitude to the government in the country of origin sustained similar attitudes in the country of migration. However, experiences of discrimination led to less trust in the government. All the same, respondents were seen to evaluate how assurances of leaders played out in policy implementation especially immigration, when expressing their overall trust of the government.

The conclusive chapter summarizes the findings of the six chapters. Thus, as stated in the foreword by the series editor Ruben Martinee, this book covers the perceptual experiences of Mexican immigrants in two rural towns in west central Illinois, an unconventional destination. The author through her systematic research using mixed methods shares the growing pains of these immigrants as they make these communities their home, communities that have had almost no contact with other nationals, speaking a different language. While this is an unexplored context with some encouraging and not so encouraging observations, the study's findings also affirm the realities of the immigration exercise for Mexicans despite their long association with this country.

The book however falls short in not doing justice in elaborating the research procedures and analytic details. The entire research method description is covered in one page with no mention of ethical procedures followed. The inclusion of details of the groundwork done in preparing these immigrant communities for this research as well as the author's own interpretations of her findings from her own immigrant perspective would have made for a rich narrative. While the author has utilized and included relevant literature, the primary data tends to recede in the background in some places since it is often combined with the extant literature. It may have made for easier reading and comprehension if the quantitative and qualitative aspects were reported separately and the common threads inferred in a separate section. In line with providing the survey instrument the questions asked for the interviews could have been included separately as well.

Given that a quarter of the US population lives in rural small towns and this trend in immigrant settlements as brought to light by Abarracin, it stands to be seen how this plays out in times to come. A recent Washington Post- Kaiser Family Foundation survey of rural and urban Americans (n=1700) does reveal concerns from the rural populace about this changing

demographic and resource sharing (DelReal & Clement, 2017). This book provides a starting point to study other nationalities of immigrants and in other rural locales in the United States.

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