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Book Review of New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States Edited by Victor Zuniga and Ruben Hernandez Leon

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A noteworthy feature of Mexican immigration to the United States during the decade from 1990 to 2000 was a significant change in destinations. Traditional receiving states gained a much smaller proportion of all Mexican immigrants while numbers in various Southern and Midwestern states soared. The percentage of all recent Mexican immigrants in California in 1990, for example, was 62.9% percent, and only 35.4% in 2000. On the other hand, the percentage of all recent Mexican immigrants in North Carolina in 1990 was 0.3% as compared with 4.0% in 2000.
New Destinations is the first book to provide ethno­graphic accounts of recent Mexican migration to places that had previously seen few Mexican immigrants, including Nebraska; North Carolina; southern Louisiana; Lexington, Kentucky; and Marshalltown, Iowa. The Nebraska chapter, authored by Lourdes Gouveia, Miguel A. Carranza, and and Jasney Cogua, describes the substantial growth of the Hispanic population in the state’s two largest cities, Omaha and Lincoln, between 1990 and 2000 (185.7% in Omaha and 116.6 % in Lincoln). Those percentages pale, however, compared to the growth in some smaller cities. In Lexington, Nebraska, the immigrant Hispanic population’s decade growth was 1,456.5% and in Schuyler 1,377.4%. In Lexington and Schuyler meatpacking was the predominant source of employment for new Mexican immigrants. Their entrance into that industry’s labor force coincided with a reduction in the strength of labor unions and a lower wage structure.

Together, the book’s case studies illustrate two themes. The first is the role of employers in the meatpacking, poultry, carpet, and other industries in recruiting Mexicans, many of whom were undocumented, in order to increase corporate profits. The second is a split within the native­born in each community between the employers who benefit from this migration and others who feel that their culture has been violated by alien newcomers.

Among the various studies presented, particularly interesting is Zúñiga and Hernández-León’s examination of Dalton, Georgia, the economy of which is dominated by Shaw Industries, the largest carpet manufacturer in the world. On the other hand, Robert Courtney Smith’s account of Mexicans in New York City is marred by the complete absence of any data from the 2000 census. David M. Heer, Department of Sociology, Emeritus, University of Southern California.