

David Spener. *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009. 298pp.; \$24.95 paperback; ISBN 978-0-8014-7589-4

David Spener's *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border*, looks at Mexican migrants for whom circumstances necessitated a move the United States by any means possible, and focuses on the experiences of migrants as they cross the U.S.-Mexico border. This work is relevant reading for sociologists as well as political scientists, anthropologists, and contemporary historians, and will be especially useful to anyone interested in migration from Mexico to the United States, and all that process entails.

Through his analysis, Spener effectively shows how border-crossing strategies used by coyotes ("coyotaje") are embedded deeply in social networks and cultural practices. To do this, he tracks the origins of the word *coyote*, the history of its practice, its contemporary applications, the relationship between the coyote and the migrant, and the views of migrants, border officials, governments, and media of coyotes and their practices.

In terms of methodological approaches, Spener uses several lenses for his observations, including global apartheid, which is based on Gernot Kohler's analysis of postcolonial racial stratification. In addition, he uses the theory of "resistencia hormiga," which he defines as "the specific forms that everyday resistance takes with respect to clandestine border-crossing by autonomous migrants" (23). And finally, this book makes much of recent theories on social capital, an important domain of work in this area.

Spener utilizes a variety of different sources to support his study, but relies most heavily upon qualitative methods, notably information gleaned from interviews and field observations. In his extensive interviews, he talks to migrants, coyotes, and law enforcement, on both sides of the border, to gain a more comprehensive perspective. In addition, he makes great use of the Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México. He also gains a significant amount of quantitative data from examining court cases on "alien smuggling" cases from U.S. District Courts for Southern and Western Texas. Combining a variety of sources allows him to pursue both a macro- and micro-level understanding of the process and participants in border crossing.

This work ties in thematically with several different literatures related to immigration, borders, undocumented immigration, and intermediaries. Spener relies heavily on the work of Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone, in their book, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002). In addition, there are definite connections between Spener's contemporary analysis and the research Mae Ngai conducted for her book, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Finally, Kelly Lytle Hernandez's, *Migra!: A History of the U. S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) ties in nicely with Spener's analysis of this institution and its recurring attempts to curtail the migration of undocumented Mexicans into the United States.

Spener also makes a strong case for coyotes as an important intermediary in the migration process. Thematically, this ties in nicely with several historical works on immigration. As he points out, the importance of intermediaries is nothing new in Mexico, and this ties in nicely with Yanna Yannakakis' 2008 work, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press). The role of go-betweens, however, is not bounded by geography. Madeline Hsu's, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) deals with a more ritualized and coyote-like process by which Chinese immigrants were assisted in memorizing minutiae about fake family members in order to gain entry to the United States. Finally, go-betweens take a central role in Gunther Peck's book, *Reinventing Free Labor:*

Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which analyzes the role of labor impresarios in bringing over immigrant labor. In addition, Peck, like Spener, tends to present these much maligned immigration actors as in fact necessary and helpful to immigrants.

This work has several strengths. First, it exemplifies the herculean tasks that can be accomplished by a single researcher over the course of over a decade of research and writing on both sides of the border between the United States and Mexico. He does a good job in defining the terms he uses and why he uses them in that way. The clarity of writing in this work reflects clarity of thought that makes his work accessible to students of immigration at all levels.

He also does an excellent job of giving a snapshot of one specific area of the Texas-Mexico border, suggesting that the diversity of the border is so vast that results for the California portion of the border may not apply to the Texas boundary. While Spener could be faulted for not covering the whole border, it represents his wise decision to do research on a small area thoroughly instead of a broad and cursory view of a large area. He also does a compelling job in casting coyotes in a gentler light, showing how many are not the bloodthirsty and money-grubbing hoodlums commonly characterized by the border patrols on both sides of the border, and in the news media.

In terms of weaknesses, this research only covers the situation through the border only going through 2005, even though the book was published in 2009. There is very little in terms of the contemporary political debates that have occurred regarding immigration, especially the 2007 debates in Congress and more recent discussions, including Obama's initiatives aimed at younger undocumented migrants. In addition, in his policy suggestions, while salient, assume a political willingness to undertake comprehensive immigration reform, which is an ever more remote possibility given the partisan divides in Congress.

Overall, this book provides a useful a must-read for anyone interested in the complicated and personal story of migration across the border between the United States and Mexico.

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