

Some Notes on Crises of Immigration - I

--reading: especially R. Acuña, *Occupied America*, chaps 6 & 7 and Estevan Flores, "A Call to Action"

Push-Pull Theory & Acuña's Narrative

--Acuña quite explicitly frames his narrative of Mexican immigration to the United States in terms of push and pull

factors

--push from Mexico, mainly insecurity, available transportation, population growth and unemployment

--"conditions in Mexico worsened" (p. 128) ⇒ increased movement north

--"Internal discontent increased as unemployment affected a large sector of the Mexican labor market. Emigration consequently skyrocketed." (p. 167)

--pull from the US mainly a function of business needs during upturns

--"The influx of undoc. workers continued as long as jobs in the United States were plentiful " (p. 130)

--"insatiable demands for cheap labor" (p. 163), from US business

--except for a few individual narratives, immigrants are thus discussed largely in terms of *faceless victims* of forces beyond their control "Mexicans did what people have always done --they followed the resources--"

Immigration Policy & Acuña's Narrative

--beyond his discussion of economic forces, lies his analysis of the overtly political side of immigration: policy

--policy appears partly as tool of economics (growers use pressure to get policies written so they can get labor

--policy appears partly as tool of politicians playing on economic & racist fears (nativism); fueled by newspapers which "created an anti-Mexican environment by making Mexicans scapegoats during times of depression." (p. 128)

--fear of competitors for jobs

--fear of aliens subverting the myth of the American way of life

--fear of violence & crimes against property

--critique: the push-pull analysis makes immigrants seem like flotsam on the tides of the economy and history, but the severity of the repressive policies aimed against them suggest the contrary, namely that they have been very real subjects, acting under their own initiative and often against the needs of business; thus the need for severe measures to deport them, to pit locals against them, etc.

--critique: Acuña's account of the repressive measures designed to reduce the labor supply when it is not needed also

makes it clear that the policies were aimed not merely at individual undocumented workers but at the whole communities in which they reside and through which they move, thus Chicanos as well as Mexicanos have felt the weight of repressive measures (in film *Mi Familia / My Family* wife is rounded up and deported deep into Mexico despite being an American citizen)

--critique: to understand the need for scapegoats (immigrants) we need a larger picture than the one Acuña tells, namely an analysis of the force which needs to be diverted, e.g., in 30s the wave of industrial worker mobilization threatened radical upheaval, thus attack on immigrants; e.g., Operation Wetback (1949) was accompanied by Taft-Hartley and McCarran-Walter Acts and followed the great strike wave of 1946; attacks on immigrants in 1970s came in the wake of the cycle of struggle (including those of immigrants) which undermined Keynesianism, etc.

Chicano Resistance

--effective pitting of Chicano against Mexicanos was eventually undermined by growth of Chicano ideology, especially that of Aztlan that emphasized continuity in cultural, ethnic, linguistic traditions across the border

--examples of shift: agricultural labor organizing, UFW: from anti-undocumented to efforts to organize the undocumented along with everyone else; mobilization of Chicano activists against the Carter Plan for immigration control (see "Call to Action" by Estevan Flores)

A Call to Action

--issued in response to Carter Plan: a new restrictive approach to immigration, seen aimed primarily at Mexicans, and at the same time at Chicano communities

--unlike Acuña's narrative, emphasis is on POWER of immigrants and state policies are treated as a response to that power that threatens it

--the immigrant appears as an active subject, a "multinational worker" who, like multinational corporations, moves

internationally according to decisions made about opportunities and relative costs