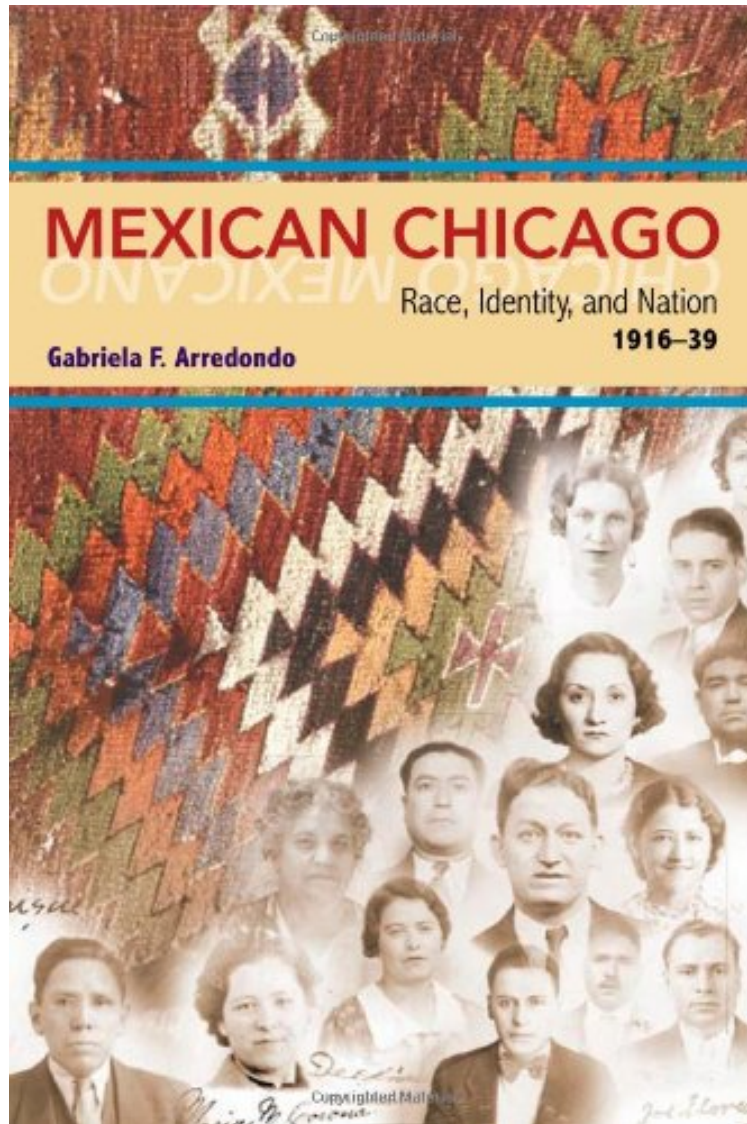


[Read now] Mexican Chicago: Race, identity and Nation, 1916-39 (Statue of Liberty Ellis Island)

Mexican Chicago: Race, identity and Nation, 1916-39 (Statue of Liberty Ellis Island)

Gabriela F. Arredondo

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Gabriela F. Arredondo : Mexican Chicago: Race, identity and Nation, 1916-39 (Statue of Liberty Ellis Island) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mexican Chicago: Race, identity and Nation, 1916-39 (Statue of Liberty Ellis Island):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Alan MercadoGreat book5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Complex and InsightfulBy R. BornemanMexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation By

Gabriela F. Arredondo's work clearly owes a great deal to the mentors she mentions in her acknowledgements (ix). In terms of the careful circumscription of her topic (Mexicans in Chicago, 1916 - 1939) she follows in the path of Chauncey's carefully defined Gay New York. In terms of ideological foundations, she cites her indebtedness to George Sanchez (ix) whose work "shatters long-standing beliefs that immigrant acculturation necessarily brought upward mobility" (6). Arredondo relies on a wide range of research, from David Brading's scholarly, intellectual assessment of the Mexican Revolution (146) to the personal papers and interviews of Chicago sociologist Paul S. Taylor (5), from the pages of Chicago's Spanish-language newspapers (Mxico and El Heraldo) to the dignified images of immigrants posing for their naturalization petitions. Though her use of primary sources is, at times, problematic, it is in her assessment of the gendered construction of race in Chicago during this time period that Arredondo's work shines most successfully. Arredondo's arguments are most compelling when she traces the way in which violence associated with Mexican men (as either perpetrators or victims) was appropriated by non-Mexican Chicago society as a means of defining popular perceptions of Mexican character itself (and not simply of Mexican men): "the seemingly gender-neutral process of racing and imbuing pejorative meaning to 'being Mexican' in fact played out in gendered-male terms." (38) Arredondo cites a variety of spectacular violent events in which Mexican men were implicated: portrayed as victims of Diaz' oppressive regime in book and film (16), through revolutionary acts and murders (17), via religious oppression and reaction leading to the Cristero revolts (20), "white mob" attacks (37, 50, 57), arrests for carrying weapons (56), race conflicts (64), as suspects in police sweeps (66), labor unrest (67), and alleged police brutality (68). Clearly, with such a litany of publicized events, the association of "Mexican" with "violence" easily infiltrated the collective consciousness of a society already willing enough to pejoratively judge others based on skin-tone (as is demonstrated by the well-documented anti-black sentiments and legislation through which Arredondo solidifies her case of anti-Mexican and racist discrimination). Arredondo avoids merely repeating racist assumptions of non-Mexican society by noting the way in which the "absence of women again signals the extent to which these dynamics played out in the gendered-male interactions" (69). While I greatly admire the compelling manner in which she shows the way in which racialization is gendered, if Arredondo had placed more emphasis on perception of these incidents as part of a discourse that was perpetuated in both Mexican and non-Mexican Chicago society, she might have more effectively made her point. While her argument (of gendered racialization) is furthered when she more closely presents the (generally negative) impact of male Mexican behavior on Mexican women in her treatment of gender relations in Chapter 4, she runs the risk of promoting gender stereotypes. While she references the fact of desertion (by their husbands) of non-Mexican women (115), she does not provide evidence to dispel the suggestion that the desertion of Mexican women by Mexican men is higher than other rates of desertion. (A simple chart may have sufficed - if the evidence is available.) While she attributes desertion to "male adventurism" (116), her association of "male adventurism" with motives for men to migrate to Chicago (27) is not countered by an equal analysis of "male adventurism" among other immigrant groups (Poles, Spaniards, etc.). Though she has marshaled the statistics to demonstrate the preponderance of Mexican men in Chicago in the early and succeeding years (thanks to hiring practices, 44), a few charts with data citations might have led more visual appeal and rhetorical satisfaction to her arguments about the gendered manner in which Mexicanidad was produced among Chicagoans. Absent in her entire discussion of both Mexican women and men is the role of "same-sex" sexual relations. Given a society in which men so vastly outnumber women, it is odd that Arredondo does not once mention male homosexuality within the Mexican community in Chicago. And while Arredondo focuses on hetero-"normative" roles for women in Chicago of this period, lesbian relationships are not a topic she seems able (or willing?) to raise. Sexuality aside, the two other large gaps which seem to appear in her work revolve around the role of education and language acquisition. While her maps of Chicago, created by Taylor in his 1928 studies were designed explicitly to show the presence of Mexican grammar-school enrollment (43, 49, 52), she never directly addresses the treatment of children in the Chicago schools past a few cursory references. While her focus on housing patterns (39 ff.), labor relations (58 ff.), police relations (64 ff.), cross-cultural gender relations (70 ff.), and commercial relations (75 ff.) is superb, child education (one of the most potent sources of Americanization) is virtually ignored. A final gap in her work emerges in her treatment of language acquisition. While she simply states, "language was central to Mexican experiences in Chicago" (142), she equally implies that a lack of proficiency in English was a marker of "Mexican" identity, both within and outside the Mexican community (158). She notes ways in which language affected all aspects of social interaction, even entertainment (110). Arredondo points to the way in which "the particular dynamics of Chicago prevented [Mexicans] from learning English" (142), emphasizing the way in which a lack of English skills (or literacy in general) led to a cycle of poor job-marketability (123, 138, 141) or fluency to job success (118). Yet her structuralist argument against English-language accessibility seems as much an oversimplification as the non-Mexican claims that Mexicans "showed no inclination to learn English" (94). While I believe Arredondo has, in fact, begun to trace a very controversial explanation as to why English-language acquisition among Mexicans in Chicago was low, she does not complete that task in this work.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. great scholarship, great stories
By Douglas Sackman
Mexican Chicago is a wonderful read--deeply researched, sharply argued, and vibrant with the stories and experiences of Mexican-origin people finding themselves and constructing new identities in the windy city.

Arredondo begins with her personal and family story; the book, critically engaged with and furthering the cutting-edge scholarship on racial formation, gender, nationalism and identity, always also grows out of these real stories of real people like those of her own family. Her interpretations are nuanced, eschewing a simply narrative of a monolithic Mexican community facing prejudice in Chicago, and ultimately facing it down. The book uncovers agency in a variety of realms, and reveals as well the divisions of class and identity within the community and shows the dynamic interrelationship of Mexicans and other groups in Chicago whose identities were also being formed or reformed. Great scholarship--Mexican Chicago is not only a new and needed contribution to Chicago and "Chicana/o" history, but also to our understanding of immigration, gender, citizenship and race in North America.

Mexican Chicago builds on previous studies of Mexicans in the United States while challenging static definitions of American and underlying assumptions of assimilation. Gabriela F. Arredondo contends that because of the revolutionary context from which they came, Mexicans in Chicago between 1916 and 1939 were not just another ethnic group working to be assimilated into a city that has a long history of incorporating newcomers. Suggesting a new understanding of identity formation, she argues that Mexicans wielded tools of identification forged in revolutionary Mexico to collectively battle the prejudices of ethnic groups that included Poles, Italians, and the Irish, as well as African Americans. By turning inward, however, Mexicans also highlighted tremendous differences among themselves, such as gender and class. In discussing this distinctive process of becoming Mexican in Chicago during the early twentieth century, Arredondo not only explores how that identity was constructed but also provides telling insight into the repercussions of that identity formation process.

Arredondo paints a portrait of Mexican Chicago in the early 20th century, focusing on five zones of contact: housing patterns, work and labor relations, politics, commerce, and heterosocial relations. Recommended--Choice