

Ediberto Román and Michael A. Olivas, *Those Damned Immigrants: America's Hysteria over Undocumented Immigration*. New York City: New York University Press, 2013. 186 pp. US\$40.00 (Hardcover) ISBN-13: 978-0814776575

Call me crazy, but I've always loved to see a good fight, especially if it's a political or an academic one. I consider this book an academic jab at the huge uproar of nonsense, spewing all over the media, regarding immigration. Most of the stories, particularly in the more "popular" media, make no distinction between documented and undocumented immigrants, so it typically boils down to a race issue. In the text, the author provides specific examples of statements and speeches, in which rhetoric was being used to make a certain group of Americans fear immigrants in general, documented or not. According to the Fox News talk show host, Bill O'Reilly, supporters of immigration reform "hate America" and want to "flood the country with foreign nationals...to change the complexion of America" (29). Correct me if I'm wrong, but complexion is not a tell-tale sign of citizenship status, unless of course you view any non-white person as illegal. Secondly, what exactly is the complexion of America? When making statements like the ones mentioned throughout this review, such as calling immigrants rapists, drug dealers, etc., you are attaching a face to those statements. While people can't see "documented" versus "undocumented", they can see non-white, and that is the thing they grow to fear because that's usually all a person can gather just by looking at someone. While this text serves primarily as an educated discourse, it also serves as a cautionary tale on the power of rhetoric, and, perhaps implicitly, encourages us to use that power wisely. I'm getting off my soapbox now.

All that aside, I think the author makes a nice attempt at being totally unbiased by supporting his arguments with numerous empirical studies, but I can see the forest through the trees, and suspect that other readers will do the same. The authors are calling "baloney" on this whole inaccurate, one-sided discourse that blames undocumented immigrants for America's problems! To begin with, they literally call out Americans, on both sides of the debate, for either making such prejudicial statements or for not speaking out against those statements more loudly. The authors make the comparison between undocumented Latino immigrants and other marginalized populations to call attention to the fact that, when other groups are the targets of such hatred, we boldly demand action either through protest, getting people fired, etc. However, when things about undocumented immigrants take place, those of us who are in support of immigration, at best, say that those attacks are "insensitive"; it typically goes no further than that. The author makes an interesting point that the reason for this reaction, or lack of a better one, could be due to the fact that people view them as "illegal", and, therefore, deserving of any criticism, no matter how hateful (6). And then, attention is redirected to the validity of those attacks. If I could count the number of times I've heard that undocumented immigrants are stealing jobs, destroying the economy, etc., I'd need another set of hands! The authors do a nice job of articulating what others of us are screaming. First of all, contrary to popular false knowledge, the authors note that immigration actually declines during a recession; just like most Americans, they want no part of our economy when it's crappy, so stop blaming them for the economy Americans caused. (50) Secondly, they are not taking American jobs; domestic businesses are giving those jobs to them because they don't want to have to pay you minimum wage plus benefits. After reading this text, I think all Americans should take a chill pill, step out of our emotional bubbles, and see the bigger picture.

Their ultimate conclusion seems to be that the "issue" of immigration that comes up in every presidential election and satiric talk show may not be that great of an issue at all; in fact, the

magnitude of the issue all depends on the rhetoric of those that discuss it. It is rhetoric that ultimately determines how “tough” on immigration the United States wants to be at any given time, not actual researched facts, and in fact there has been relatively marginal differences beyond the rhetoric (at least to date) between Obama and Trump in regards to the deportation of undocumented people, of examples. The book uses numerous studies to challenge the three basic premises associated with the “illegal immigration invasion” discourse: that there is an “invasion” of illegal immigrants, that the invasion will have devastating effects on the American economy, and that this invasion will lead to unprecedented crime rates.

According to the text, the claim that there will be some huge invasion into the United States by Mexicans, or attempted overthrow of the United States government in our southwestern territory, is largely unsupported by facts, and used by politicians as a strategy to garner favor among what I would characterize as a disproportionately racist population -- the white working class. While politicians and anti-immigrant advocates use exorbitant figures for their own benefit, other studies show that immigration rates are far more modest. According to the National Research Council, the number of foreign-born living in the United States, as a percentage of the total population, was higher for each year from 1850 to 1930 than it was for 1990 (48). In another study done by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2010, immigration rates had actually gone down in the last decade; in fact, the annual flow of unauthorized immigrants to the United States was nearly two-thirds smaller in the March 2007 to March 2009 period than it had been from March 2000 to March 2005 (49). The hysteria over this mass invasion is based on nothing but rhetoric based on nothing but false claims to advance an agenda.

While the text discusses the false claim that the “Mexican invasion” will lead to unprecedented crime rates, I did not think the analysis was particularly interesting because I know that that is a primary means in which bigots and racists try to dehumanize and vilify any ethnic minority they feel threatened by. No matter what the studies suggest, this is a subject that certain groups will always skew to favor their biased opinions. For example, a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center, called “Getting Immigration Facts Straight”, addressing a claim made on famous anchor Lou Dobbs’ show that in 2005 the 7,000 cases of leprosy in the United States were, in his words, one of the “deadly imports” of immigration (32). Statements like this, surprisingly, did not make me angry or sad; in fact, it makes me laugh that people can be so desperate to have people hate other people, they will say anything they can pull out of... a hat. Along with this, Dobbs frequently refers to illegal aliens from Mexico to the U.S. as an “army of invaders”, and even had a falsely-proclaimed medical doctor on the show that alleged that Mexican immigrants were prone to molesting children (32-33). More ludicrous comments are featured in the text, but these “facts” are clearly not rooted in fact; they are rooted in a political agenda. To add icing on top of this already god-awful cake, the text quotes a statement made by U.S. Representative Steve King of Iowa, who said “the lives of 12 U.S. citizens would be saved who otherwise die a violent death at the hands of murderous illegal aliens each day. Another 13 Americans would survive who are otherwise killed by uninsured drunk driving illegals” (51). In case you’re wondering, yes, this is real life, and, yes, he actually made drunk driving and crime an immigration problem to advance his own agenda. While I understand the author’s choice in fully discussing this part of the debate and essentially putting these horrendous acts in the faces of readers, I don’t find it to be the most powerful means of changing the rhetoric; it just reinforces that the U.S. is not a post-racial society, but we already knew that. Thus, I will skip that premise, and dive right into the alleged catastrophic affects that undocumented immigrants have on the economy.

The way the author addresses this issue did nothing short of make me smile; he structures his analysis in a way that suggests that the relationship between migrant workers, which he distinguishes from undocumented immigrants, and domestic businesses is one of supply and demand. He says that it is American companies, like construction companies, that attract and create a market for many undocumented immigrants because they like to take advantage of the cheap labor costs. Bill Gates is noted to have frequently complained that stricter immigration policies will impede the ability of businesses to hire skilled workers. Even an “American Farm Bureau Federation study notes that the agriculture industry’s loss of access to migrant labor would cause them to lose over \$5 billion in annual production of commodities” (59), meaning that domestic businesses want them and our economy benefits from them. Therefore, while anti-immigrant institutions and much of the American working class like to blame their lack of a job or resources on undocumented immigrants, they fail to point their fingers in the right direction—at domestic businesses. However, before pointing those fingers, it is important to note that the presence of immigrants in this country, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, has little to do with unemployment rates among any native-born racial or ethnic group at the state or metropolitan level (81). Maybe, then, instead of pointing, we should all just hold our hands in the air because everything seems to be no one’s fault and everyone’s fault all at the same time.

Now, the author does clarify that he is not making the argument that there are no economic downfalls of having undocumented immigrants in the workforce, but he is saying that the temporary costs that an immigrant family would place on the overall public would later be offset by the taxable income that they will eventually contribute. He addresses the costs that state and local governments face concerning providing healthcare and education to undocumented immigrants, and suggests that the federal government share its net gains from working undocumented immigrants with the state and local governments. To accomplish this goal, he proposes a new Guest Worker program that would allow states to accurately collect data on the number of undocumented immigrants in their workforce and communities; officials could then use this information to call upon the federal government to help bear some of the costs it brings. Furthermore, the money the country spends on antiterrorism resources, some which they use to arrest low-income farm workers, could be allocated elsewhere. This would be both a benefit, and detriment, depending on your perspective, to domestic business sectors. On the upside, they would be able to hire the skilled workers they desire, but on the downside, they would have to give them basic rights and actually treat them like human beings, not just commoditized bodies (146). Under the former Guest Worker program, proposed by President George W. Bush, foreign workers would be allowed to “fill” the jobs Americans didn’t want, but must return home after their job is completed, but under the author’s proposal, undocumented immigrants and migrant workers could use this as a path to potential citizenship (145-147). This all sounds great, aside from the fact that getting domestic businesses to provide their undocumented workers with more rights and higher pay will be no easy feat because their former incentive for hiring them in the first place would be eliminated.

Though this was published in 2013, much of the rhetoric described herein is as prevalent, and perhaps even moreso given current events in the US and the emergence of the Trump White House, and Trump’s plan to build an actual wall to “keep immigrants out”. Since most of this President’s work is done on Twitter, it wasn’t very hard to locate a tweet from June 2015, where he said, “We must have strong borders and stop illegal immigration. Without that, we do not have a country.” Unfortunately, I couldn’t search long enough for his comments about Mexicans being “rapists” and “bringing drugs” to the U.S., but you get the point. While, admittedly, I have heard

Brianna Owens, book review, Román and Olivas, *Those Damned Immigrants*, *AmeriQuests* 14.1 (2017)

less about the suspected “invasion” of Mexican immigrants taking over the United States, the DREAM Act, which allows undocumented immigrants to earn citizenship by going to college or serving in the military, has been all the buzz these days. Under this administration, I’d say his plan for a guest worker program, the DREAM Act, and a path to citizenship are, at best, idealistic, and, for Trump, a dream deferred.

Brianna Owens, JD candidate  
Vanderbilt University Law School