

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2ft170jh>

Author

FitzGerald, David Scott

Publication Date

2011-02-01

DOI

10.1080/1369183x.2010.523226

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation

David Scott FitzGerald

To cite this article: David Scott FitzGerald (2011) The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37:2, 352-353, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2010.523226](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.523226)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.523226>



Published online: 06 Dec 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 226



View related articles [↗](#)

scrutiny; detailed criteria are applied such as their knowledge of local languages and political structures, their willingness to renounce their homeland citizenship despite the Swiss recognition of dual citizenship, and their lack of a record of unemployment and dependence on welfare benefits. While this appears to contradict his initial rejection of economic factors as explanatory variables, Helbling concludes that authorities' emphasis on applicants' records in this regard cannot be explained by local politicians' unwillingness to support these residents financially. Rather, it is due to the symbolic importance assigned to being a 'good' Swiss citizen who is not dependent on the state. This level of analytical depth was made possible by the study's qualitative component, focusing on individual actors whose recommendations affect the outcome of naturalisation processes.

Though the qualitative component of the study appears to be modelled closely on the quantitative sections of the work, overall the methodological rigour undertaken and the theoretical and analytical sophistication achieved are impressive. The quantitative analyses pursued are very thorough, with multiple models controlling for variables presented as important in the citizenship and integration literature. Although there is room for debate on the way in which indicators have been calculated, ultimately the study represents a valuable effort to quantify contextual and vague processes, allowing, then, for comparisons across otherwise incomparable locales. The study also goes beyond the more usual approach of focusing either on the applicant (the immigrant) or on national policy. In so doing, it presents a missing link: the people who receive and process applications, conduct interviews, and present cases to the final decision-makers. The book is a 'must read' for any student of citizenship.

Zeynep Kilic
University of Alaska Anchorage
© 2011 Zeynep Kilic

Leo R. Chavez, **The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation**
Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 256 pp., \$55.00 hb. (ISBN 978-0-8047-5933-5), \$21.95 pb. (ISBN 978-0-8047-5934-2)

The Latino Threat represents cultural studies at its best. Interdisciplinary will sip an intoxicating cocktail that is equal parts Foucauldian

discourse analysis and the demographer's age-sex pyramid. Anthropologist Leo Chavez builds on his earlier published content analyses of coverage of Latino immigrants in major US news magazines to describe and debunk what he calls the 'Latino Threat Narrative'. In this narrative, Latinos are portrayed as a reproductive threat to native Whites, an irredentist minority bent on reconquering the South-West, and a balkanising ethnic group that refuses to integrate into American society. Extensive quotations and images from publications such as *Time* and *US News and World Report* put to rest questions of whether the 'Latino Threat Narrative' is confined to the lunatic fringe. The central contribution of the book is the description of just how misleading and fear-mongering is the US mainstream media's coverage of Latinos.

Chavez then challenges the threat narrative with evidence drawn from the secondary literature and his own surveys in Orange County, California (the state's third most populous county, with more than three million residents, and ground zero for political measures such as 1994's Proposition 187 that are unfriendly to Latino immigrants). The survey data from Orange County show the same general trends of Latino assimilation found in national-level data, including greater intergenerational educational attainment, English dominance, outmarriage, home ownership and income. Chavez argues that unauthorised legal status is the biggest challenge to socio-economic mobility faced by many Latino immigrants, and that stakeholders seriously interested in encouraging Latino integration should support a large-scale legalisation programme.

Unlike many accounts of citizenship (in the broadest anthropological sense of membership) that focus only on social actors making claims to inclusion, Chavez analyses the interactions between claims of inclusion and counter-claims of exclusion that are made by immigration restrictionists. The book is structured around extended vignettes of the Minutemen activists publicising unauthorised entries along the Mexican border, the 2006 immigration reform marches, the ethnic politics of fertility and disputes about the legitimacy of organ transplants for non-citizens.

Chavez concludes that Latinos have internalised the demands of neoliberalism, that is, to work hard and make claims to membership based on contributions to the economy and low rates of usage of public services. The book does not offer strong evidence of how common this framing is, however, relative to other frames for

immigrant mobilisation based on universalistic principles of human rights, the social-democratic language of trade unionism, or the discourse of autochthonous primacy in formulations such as 'we didn't cross the border; the border crossed us'. Similarly, an understanding of the extent to which media narratives coincide with (and probably do much to generate) public opinion about Latinos would have been helped by discussing historical public opinion data on acceptance of Latino immigrants and levels of restrictionism in the general population.

Still, the topic is timely, the synthetic approach is masterfully executed and the writing is lucid and accessible. I would recommend the book for undergraduate or postgraduate courses on the politics of immigration, ethnicity or media.

David Scott FitzGerald
University of California, San Diego
© 2011 David Scott FitzGerald