

*Que se queden allá: El gobierno de México y la repatriación de mexicanos en Estados Unidos (1934-1940)*

Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, Tijuana,

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Alanís Enciso has written the definitive account of one of the most fascinating and understudied episodes in the Mexican Government's evolving stance towards emigration and its citizens living in the United States. Previous histories have sketched the broad outline of Mexican repatriation policy during the Great Depression in the United States. An estimated 400 000 Mexicans, including many US citizens of Mexican descent, were repatriated from 1929 through the end of the 1930s. Scrutinizing repatriation policy through his historical microscope, the author finds considerable variation over the course of the decade. This book extends existing accounts by mining the archival papers of the Lázaro Cárdenas administration and the US Immigration and Naturalization Service to put

the repatriations into the broader context of Mexican demographic and foreign policy; differentiate among the various strains of repatriation policy; and provide the most detailed history yet of its most ambitious effort at returnee agricultural colonization.

Some of the micro distinctions the author makes to separate this work from other repatriation histories published in Spanish and English may not engage general readers, but where the book breaks fundamental new ground is in its detailed discussion of the relationship between Mexican immigration and emigration policy. He argues that the most ambitious repatriation efforts of the Cárdenas administration were designed in large part to inoculate the government from the charge that it was showing too much favor to Spanish refugees in the

late 1930s. Opening the doors to more Spaniards, when the *gachupines* had remained the target of retribution for their disproportionate influence over Mexican commerce long after Independence, threatened to provoke nationalist antipathy, particularly at a time of economic crisis. One of the “antirrefugiado” arguments was that resources should be directed toward México’s own in the United States rather than Spaniards. Cárdenas thus extended his hand first to Mexicans in the North as a kind of political prophylaxis. For both Cárdenas and his opponents, repatriation policy was mostly symbolic politics intended to advance unrelated goals.

Cárdenas’ repatriation plans were not novel. Since the Porfiriato, repatriation had been a longstanding policy of the Mexican Government, with sporadic efforts to execute the policy only when driven by push factors emanating from the United States. The book elaborates the ambivalence with which Mexican political elites viewed return migration when it became imminent. On the one hand, experts like Manuel Gamio argued that returnees would be engines of modernization who would help develop the Mexican economy and elevate its civiliza-

tion through the introduction of ideas and practices learned in the United States. This developmentalist dream was balanced by fears that returnees would contaminate México with foreign political ideas. The notion of a foreign political menace can be broken down into two parts: first, a traitorous dissimulation away from identification with México toward identification with the United States; and second, the adoption of increased expectations of democratic governance and higher levels of state services. Within México, different views of the desirability of emigration and return migration emerged along the lines of geography, level of government, specific agency, and relationship to the ruling regime.

The author takes a critical distance from the romanticized notion that the Cárdenas administration called México’s children abroad home, emphasizing that repatriation policy was sporadic, underfunded, and halfhearted, with only modest results. Importantly, the author shows the Secretariat of Foreign Relations negotiated directly with authorities in California in 1939 and Texas in 1940 to ease repatriation pressures, a finding that puts a book end to the policy in the early

1930s, when the Mexican Government typically worked together with subnational governments in the United States to promote repatriation.

Indeed, more than simply ambivalent, the Cárdenas administration's policies were sometimes contradictory. One of the axis of the policy was that Mexicans employed in the United States should stay there so they could continue to send remittances to México and avoid humiliating México's national image by being deported for vagrancy. The second axis was that only those who had special skills to offer the Mexican economy should return. To the extent that those with special skills were more likely to retain their US jobs, the two principles were at odds with each other.

An entire chapter is devoted to the saga of the Colonia 18 de Marzo in the northern state of Tamaulipas, which was formed by 4 000 repatriates in 1939. The case merits extended study because as the author observes, it was the first large colony of repatriates. At the time they comprised a quarter of the population of the Mexican side of the lower Rio Bravo Valley. The returnees were convinced by the government to come

to México even though they were not facing particularly intense repatriation pressures in Texas. Finally, although the Colonia 18 de Marzo suffered from numerous financial, political, and ecological travails, it persevered to this day.

Alanís Enciso argues that grosso modo, "let them stay there" has been the most common Mexican Government response to the emigration of its nationals to the United States. When massive returns have occurred, such as during the Great Depression, or seemed imminent, following the 1986 *Immigration Reform and Control Act* and the 9/11 attacks of 2001, the Mexican Government has been extremely nervous about the prospect of managing a large influx of repatriates. Yet this story of continuity, while correct in the narrowest sense, elides wider shifts in México's policy towards emigration and emigrants. In broad strokes, Mexican policies have shifted from failed efforts to control emigration until the early 1970s to policies of managing emigrants already in the United States since the 1990s. Still, for the history of the Cárdenas era repatriations, whatever their limits, one can do no better than to turn to *Que se queden allá*.