

Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States

Edited by Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado
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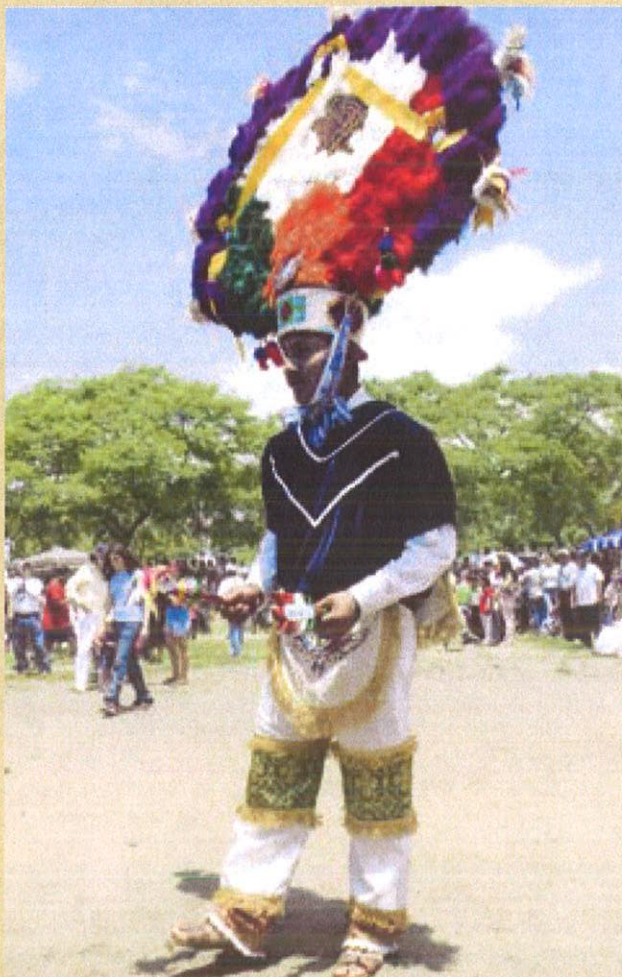
Indigenous people have migrated from Mexico to the United States for decades. In recent years, growing poverty in the Mexican countryside has increased both their numbers and their proportion in the migrant population. Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado document these changing patterns in *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States* and analyze evidence of a “binational civil society” that is transforming cultural, social, and political practices across two countries.

According to the editors, the Mixtec and Zapotec peoples have notably long histories of migration to the United States, primarily to California. Newer streams representing nearly all of Mexico’s major indigenous groups now flow to Illinois, New York, Oregon, Florida and other states as well. Fox and Rivera claim these indigenous Mexicans often face discrimination on several levels: as migrants, as low-wage workers and as indigenous people, especially if they do not speak Spanish. They face barriers both within U.S. society and even among other Mexican migrants. As a result, once in the United States, many migrants who have primarily seen themselves as members of their local community begin to identify with others of their own ethnicity or simply as indigenous people.

Despite these challenges—and because of them—indigenous migrants have formed numerous organizations that are transforming their communities of origin and their new home communities in the United States. Fox and Rivera note that “social identities are created and recreated” as these migrants adapt their social, cultural and political practices to address their current needs to, for example, celebrate religious festivals, preserve traditions, exercise worker rights or negotiate remittance-funded projects with state governments in Mexico. Among the many associations founded by indigenous migrants, the binational, pan-ethnic Frente Indígena Binacional Oaxaqueño

(FIOB) stands out because of the increasing diversity of its indigenous members and because of its affiliates throughout both Mexico and the United States.

Fox and Rivera-Salgado’s book includes chapters by prominent indigenous migrant leaders, journalists and scholars documenting the challenges that indigenous migrant organizations face as they build binational political agendas. Especially important are the alternative media facilitating the exchange of ideas. These include the FIOB’s monthly newspaper and El Oaxaqueño, both circulated north and south of the border as well as Radio Bilingüe, a station serving migrants in California that has added broadcasts in Mixteco as has a public radio station in Fresno. Fox and Rivera conclude that indigenous migrants are developing what the editors call “translocal community citizenship”—the ability to shape conditions and debates in Mexico and the United States through active participation in binational collective action. It also adds nuance to the ongoing debate on immigration which generally overlooks the diversity among those migrating.—
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