

## Book Review

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**Cristina Salinas. 2018. *Managed Migrations: Growers, Farmworkers, and Border Enforcement in the Twentieth Century*. Austin: University of Texas Press.**

The summer of 2020 seemed a particularly appropriate moment to read Cristina Salinas's *Managed Migrations*. In between readings, I attended video calls with members of the immigrant community in Central Pennsylvania, where farm workers faced the paradoxical dilemma of being deemed both "illegal" and "essential." Meanwhile, protesters across the country called for a national reexamination of law enforcement practices and policies, and officials in Texas removed the statue of a once-revered figure: Texas Ranger Capt. Jay Banks. The present-day enforcers of immigration law, however—the Border Patrol and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—have yet to experience such a reckoning. Although Cristina Salinas examines historical issues related to migration, agriculture, and law enforcement, the underlying problems remain highly relevant today.

Examining migration patterns along the Texas-Mexico border during the 1920s to 1950s, *Managed Migrations* considers the dynamic interplay of actors that worked to control and politicize Mexican workers' mobility. These include the US and Mexican national governments, labor activists, local officials, and—most notably—two forces which powerfully intertwined during the 1940s and 50s: the Border Patrol and the US growers who employed Mexican migrant workers on their farms.

In six chapters and an epilogue, Salinas, an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas at Arlington, draws on archival research to tell a story about unequal relations between growers and workers in the agricultural fields along the Texas-Mexico border. Chapter 1, "Where Uncle Sam Meets Mexico," examines frontier narratives from promotional campaigns sponsored by land companies and railroads to convince farmers from elsewhere in the US to purchase land and move to the border, as well as documents from legal investigations into these companies' advertising claims. In Chapter 2, "The Social Space of Agriculture," we see how these narratives of frontier and progress helped to shape the development of the agricultural industry in Texas, an agricultural market built on the foundation of an illegal workforce. Here, Salinas uses a published collection of anecdotes, *Rio Grande Wetbacks* (1972), as well as an unpublished manuscript titled *The Swarming of the Wetbacks* (n.d.),

both written by South Texas grower/farm owner Carrol Norquest, to shed light on the daily interactions of workers and growers as well as the general attitudes of growers toward the Mexicans who crossed the border each year to work on their farms.

Salinas draws a symbolic parallel between growers and slave owners, while acknowledging important differences. Slave owners once embodied both paternalism and coercion; however, Salinas notes that in South Texas growers took on a seemingly protective, paternalistic attitude toward their workers, while the Border Patrol—formed in 1924—occupied themselves with the task of coercion. Although growers may have carefully crafted an image of themselves as protecting migrant laborers from deportation by the Border Patrol, Norquest’s anecdotes, supported by interviews with former workers from the Norquest farm, suggest that the same farmers often used personal connections and power networks to negotiate with the Border Patrol on the ground, ensuring that workers were deported *only after* picking had concluded.

Ultimately, Salinas impugns the popular assumption that growers opposed government intervention by the Border Patrol and the forerunner of ICE, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), showing instead that they benefitted directly from the arbitrary enforcement of immigration law. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, this study suggests that the existence of these immigration enforcement agencies led to the perpetuation of undocumented labor and low wages for farm workers: “Rather than reduce access to low-waged Mexican laborers, the growth of the Border Patrol during the mid-twentieth century helped create the conditions for workers’ low wages through the selective restriction of undocumented workers’ mobility” (12–13).

Arbitrary immigration enforcement and the problematic nature of deportation are the subjects of “The Flexible Border” (chapter 3), which examines the INS’s increasing use of “voluntary departure” during the 1940s. Looking at archival newspapers from mid-century such as the *El Paso Times* and the *El Paso Herald Post*, annual reports published by the INS, and congressional hearings from the Wickersham Commission (Report on Enforcement of Deportation Laws), Salinas argues that these documents “tell a story paradoxically based on flexibility, the facilitation of movement, and ambiguity, rather than on deterrence, rigidity and clarity” (83). Flexibility in the enforcement of US immigration law resulted from the significant political influence of southwestern growers, who often colluded with INS to ensure that they met deportation goals without impacting the growing seasons. Many of these historical issues remain pertinent today; growers might be willing to express their disagreement with immigration policy in private but will not do so publicly for fear of retaliation in the form of ICE raids. Now, as at mid-century, the enforcement of immigration law is never black and white, but rather dependent on political ties and economic imperatives.

Chapter 4, “Exploitative Villains or Community Leaders?,” focuses on the role of the state (both Mexican and US) in regulating labor contractors and scapegoating them for workers’ desperate conditions while ignoring the real problem of extremely low agricultural wages. In one of the book’s most fascinating episodes, “El Paso/The Passage” (chapter 5), Salinas relates the incident of October 16, 1948, when, at an impasse in bracero negotiations between the Mexican and US governments, growers facilitated a mass crossing of unauthorized workers, loaded them onto trucks, and took them

to their farms—with the knowledge and complicity of the INS. The author’s analysis of this incident presents a new perspective regarding the interconnectedness of legal and illegal immigration. Instead of viewing these in either/or terms, Salinas argues that both governments managed legal and illegal migrations as “intertwined strands” (144).

Also of interest in this chapter is the commentary on the racializing “mass” discourse present in US officials’ accounts of workers’ movements, which they often compared to insects swarming or animals crossing a river. As Salinas aptly observes, this narrative conveniently downplayed the growers’ influence on the workers’ movements as well as the workers’ own agency. Finally, Salinas presents a critical view of organized labor’s early approach to undocumented migrant workers in Chapter 6, “The High Price of Immigration Politics During the 1950s.”

In her epilogue, Salinas briefly considers the evolution of transnational labor in the decades that followed—the Chicano movement, increasing militarization of the border, the sanctuary movement of the 1980s, NAFTA, and more recent draconian immigration laws such as Arizona SB1070, and the construction of a border wall. In addition to her scholarly interest in the matter, she also draws connections to her own South Texas family, pointing out the arbitrary laws that have hindered her parents’ movement. Many of the stories told in *Managed Migrations* are difficult to read, in part because of their enduring effects. However, Salinas seems to conclude on a hopeful note by narrating one of her own border crossings. Her observations during the journey highlight what has changed and what has remained the same—the border is still heavy on officials, but with added technology. However, there is one notable difference: Cristina Salinas, the grandchild of a Mexican laborer, ends her story by gazing at the Mexican border from the United States.

*Managed Migrations* is an accessible read for both undergraduate and graduate students and would fit well in courses on the US-Mexico border, immigration, and labor history. Given the ongoing criminalization of undocumented workers and growers’ use of these workers not just in South Texas, but across the nation, it should be required reading for immigration activists and policymakers. As a reader, it is my (perhaps, overly idealistic) hope that the stories Salinas tells will inspire dramatic, meaningful reform of immigration laws and enforcement.

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