

Region, Nation, and World-System: Perspectives on Midwestern Chicana/o History

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ABSTRACT

During its youth in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Chicana/o historical scholarship emphasized its distinctive history and geography. It paid cursory homage to indigenous roots among the Aztecs in Central Mexico, but initiated serious investigation in early 19th century Texas, New Mexico, and California, prior to the mass migration of English-speaking people from the United States. Acknowledging ancient roots and a geography comprising former Mexican territory permitted Chicana/o scholars to challenge U.S. historians who portrayed the flow of history from east to west, and portrayed Mexicans, if they portrayed them at all, as the last of the immigrants. Yet, this shifted in later works. Legal and political mechanisms imposed on Mexicans without consent deprived them of a land base and resulted in widespread downward mobility, while the dominant political culture continued to restrict Mexicans who entered the U.S. in the 20th century. The exclusion is replicated even in recent overviews and bibliographies, where reference to extant Midwestern literature is sparse and often lacking entirely. To that end, this article examines the interpretive historical frameworks adopted by 20th century scholars on Midwestern Mexicans, including the literature of the Chicana/o generation. While placing the authors in their contemporary contexts, this paper simultaneously discusses how a world-systems perspective, which is not new in Chicana/o historical scholarship, permits opportunities to address important theoretical issues in the field.