

‘Not All Borders are the Same’ *Immigration and the Racialization of the ‘Mexican Menace’ in the Midwest*

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ABSTRACT

A common thread in hegemonic popular and political culture and its scholarly circles proposes that Mexico and Mexicans are a racial menace to the White people of the United States. But this vision is not uncontested. A contrary thread has portrayed Mexican immigrants who cross the border into the U.S. Southwest as capable of assimilating into the American way of life and meritorious of citizenship, though such representations typically retain a Eurocentric assumption that Mexicans should and must understand the world through a White prism. In addition to the limitations of a Eurocentric bias in dominant popular thought, the author addresses two of its related geographic constrictions, namely the overwhelming association of Mexicans residing in the United States in the Southwest and the United States-Mexico border. The overwhelming focus on a corner of the nation is similarly evident in Chicana and Chicano counter narratives. This essay focuses on Michigan and the Midwest, and the border with Canada, which are also critical to understanding Chicana and Chicano experiences and Mexican-United States relations. First, the author examines moments in the history of the region prior to the arrival of Europeans to demonstrate the fallacy of popular assumptions that Mexicans are solely recent arrivals in the Midwest. The author then examines the region in eras following contact between Europeans and Native Americans to expose continued Mexican influence and its impact on ideas passing as knowledge in dominant popular culture.