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 **The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience (review)**

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REVIEW

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Book Review

The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience

***The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience.* Edited by Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind.** Russell Sage Foundation, 1999. 502 pp. Cloth, \$65.00.

I have bad news and good news. The bad news is that I am submitting this review more than eighteen months after it was due. The good news is that, even after an unusually long interval between publication and review, this exceedingly useful immigration sourcebook has lost none of its luster or relevance. The contents of this volume's twenty-four chapters remain as superb and timely as ever. This is all the more remarkable because immigration is a phenomenon whose nature and magnitude, whose determinants and consequences, often change faster than research and scholarship about them. Certainly the altered context of immigrant [End Page 357] reception in the U.S. since September 11, one now focused more on safety and security matters, constitutes a case in point. But certain questions endure. What factors explain international migration (any kind of geographical mobility among countries) and immigration (the taking up of legal, or at least permanent, residence in a new country)? What happens to migrants after they arrive in new countries? What effects do immigrants have on their new countries and on the people already there? These are the basic questions that drive policy debates about immigration. Their answers also influence whether such debates lead to proposals for reform. If the kinds and numbers of arriving immigrants vary from the objectives of current policy, if immigrants end up noticeably poorer or richer than natives, or if immigrants exert adverse effects on destination countries or the persons already there, political pressures for policy changes are likely to emerge.

The answers to these basic questions thus matter. This book addresses all three, each in a separate section containing from six to ten chapters. The first part of the book examines theories and concepts of international migration. It is the best overview of its subject of which I am aware. Major chapters are included by Alejandro Portes, Douglas S. Massey, Patricia Pessar, Aristide R. Zolberg, Nina Schiller, and Charles Hirschman. The topics addressed range from general theoretical issues in immigration research to theoretical syntheses of factors affecting international migration to the role of the state in influencing international movements. Readers looking for excellent summaries and synthetic treatments of state-of-the-art thinking and theorizing about immigration will have arrived at the right place when they find this book. Moreover, the chapters deal with their topics at a sufficient level of generality that the contents will not soon become dated.

The second part of the book addresses questions of assimilation and incorporation. Chapters are included by Alba and Nee, Gans, Rumbaut, Zhou, Lopez, Perlmann and Waldinger, Raijman and Tienda, and Foner. If this group does not represent the Hall of Fame in the sociology of immigration, then at least it does in the sociology of immigrant incorporation. Each of the contributing authors examine thinking and research about how well the "new" immigrants — those coming to the U.S. since 1965 — are faring, in some cases making explicit comparisons to the experience of early twentieth century immigrants. Not all arrive at the same conclusion. This is not surprising, since the process of incorporating the new immigrants is still ongoing, meaning that its final outcome remains obscure. Even so, some of the authors' assessments are clearly more pessimistic than others. An interesting question thus arises regarding what might explain this difference. Sometimes pessimism about immigration stems from cultural conservatism and sometimes optimism from economic liberalism, but this explanation ill fits this group of writers because none of them is particularly conservative. Another hypothesis is that the answer may depend upon the degree to which the authors see the U.S. as a country that is converting the new immigrants into racialized minorities, with those who think racializing processes are pronounced being more pessimistic than others. Even if such



a knowledge-based economy). Waldinger focuses on those especially hard hit by such changes in chapter 3, particularly less-skilled immigrant women, as does Clark in chapter 5.

The regional comparisons and findings (of which only a few are mentioned here) invite a plausible reinterpretation of the Cuban narrative of success in Miami and explain why the "new economy" has not depressed demand for less-skilled immigrants. These findings also add another level of specificity and qualification to the modes of immigrant incorporation outlined by Portes and Rumbaut in *Immigrant America*. It offers fresh insights and gives scholars and students a comparative model worthy of imitation, an enduring achievement indeed.

Although some of the statistical matter may prove too difficult for undergraduate students, an instructor willing to unpack it and emphasize the big picture would be providing his or her students with an exemplary model of comparative social science scholarship. The book could profitably be used in social stratification, urban studies, and race and ethnicity classes. It is hard to imagine an immigration class without this book on the syllabus. Immigration scholars will undoubtedly benefit from a thorough read. It contributes to the social capital and labor market literatures but is large enough in scope — and important enough — to be read alongside landmarks like *Immigrant America* (Portes & Rumbaut 1996), *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), and *Assimilation in American Life* (Gordon 1964).

Scholars from both restrictionist and expansionist camps will undoubtedly find some of the evidence unsettling. In terms of guiding policy, it offers tentative, nuanced conclusions, but its strength lies in its methodology and commitment to offering a more contextual understanding of how immigrants are making it, or not making it, economically. Given the network-driven nature of immigration, the exemplary analyses and approach of *Strangers at the Gates* will remain instructive and timely long after the tables and figures become dated.

The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience.

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Reviewer: FRANK D. BEAN, *University of California, Irvine*

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