

MELITA M. GARZA.
THEY CAME TO TOIL.
NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF MEXICANS
AND IMMIGRANTS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS, 2018. 264 PP.

The history of the United States Civil Rights Movement is often told as an easily digestible narrative with all the elements of a good story. *They Came to Toil* by Melita M. Garza is an attempt to uncover an invisible and understudied part of United States history. Repatriation remains a civil rights issue little known to most Americans, in part because it falls outside the racial binary through which such civil rights issues are traditionally viewed. This study seeks to fill a gap in understanding the role that news media played in the construction of ideas about Mexicans and immigration. From the get-go you get the impression that Garza truly believes that the press has the power and responsibility to do more than just report the news.

Garza looks at the media's representation of the Mexican and Mexican Americans in San Antonio during the Great Depression. Garza analyzes three key newspapers: the *San Antonio Express*, a locally owned English-language daily newspaper, the *San Antonio Light*, a national chain-operated daily owned by William Randolph Hearst, and *La Prensa*, a thriving independent Spanish-language daily newspaper owned by Mexican immigrant Ignacio Lozano. Garza argues that *La Prensa*, with its base in San Antonio, the critical hub of emerging Mexican American identity, and its circulation throughout the United States and Mexico, served a key role in providing a voice and platform for Mexican and Mexican American agency nationwide, not just in Texas. With the passing of the Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929, crossing the border without proper documentation became punishable as a federal crime. Meanwhile, Mexicans living in the

United States, including longtime residents and US citizens, were targeted in immigration crackdowns as the Hoover administration (1929-1933) sought to keep more jobs for Americans. It is during these years that we see an estimate of half a million Mexicans returning to their homeland both willingly and unwillingly.

These three newspapers framed Mexicans in dichotomous and often contradictory ways in order to meet the perceived beliefs of their audiences. Chapter after chapter, Garza shows how these newspapers used frames like the “Somos Amigos” frame or the financial frame to portray Mexican Americans as either a burden or benefit to society. In Hearst’s newspaper the *Light*, you would often see the rhetoric of Congressman John C. Box, that defined Mexicans as inferior and un-American. For the *Express*, Mexican workers were a critical economic component that the Texas economy needed to thrive. *La Prensa* columnist, Rodolfo Uranga, believed himself to be Pro-Mexican but not Pro-Mexico. In other words, he was not in favor of a Mexico that trampled the rights of the people. Mexicans who had repatriated had such confidence in *La Prensa*, that they turned to the newspapers to reach their compatriots in the United States. *La Prensa* also provided advice and warnings to Mexicans that wanted to return home but at the same time did not shy away from reporting the lack of opportunities on the other side.

They Came to Toil is a worthy addition to the project that we call the Wide Civil Rights movement. Garza is an award-winning journalist herself and her admiration for *La Prensa* and Lozano ring throughout the book. Here, Lozano’s efforts to help his countrymen are celebrated and rightfully so. Lozano’s newspapers *La Prensa* and *La Opinion* helped Mexican Americans develop a voice long before they could coalesce into a movement. Even the *Light*, that at times ignored to mention the struggles that Mexican American faced during the Great Depression, unintentionally contributed to the formation of a Mexican American identity. In their shared editorial space, Mexicans would defend themselves against the Anglos by arguing that they too paid taxes and fought by their side in the Great War. Garza says, “these public expressions of civil rights were keystrokes in the Mexican American role in what should now be understood as a Long and Wide Civil Rights Movement” (138).

Looking at these stories it also becomes apparent how both sides of the river saw these people like pawns on a chessboard. Both countries understood the value these workers possessed, but neither did much to improve their working and living conditions. Lozano's readers found they were "Mexicans on the outside" of any national imagination. As Garza puts it, "Mexico had seemingly forgotten them, while the United States had yet to truly see them" (163). Whether they realized it or not, this sentiment of not belonging neither here nor there, would be passed down to the Chicano movement.

Jesús Rivera
Texas A&M University