
Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles, by **Nora Hamilton** and **Norma Stoltz Chinchilla**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001. 292 pp. \$64.50 cloth. ISBN: 1-56639-867-3. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-868-1.

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In the past few years, we have become increasingly aware of the presence of Central American immigrants in the United States, and that recognition has been accompanied by a proliferation of research about this group. *Seeking Community in a Global City* stands out from these other studies. Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla, pioneers in the study of Central American migration, have been studying and closely monitoring this group for two decades. Their work therefore is not only a detailed account of the history of Central American migration to Southern California,

but a rare longitudinal study of the evolution of a large immigrant community from its inception.

In this book, the authors document how different actors—community and political organizers, churches, the immigrants themselves, and other ethnic groups—have contributed individually and collectively to shape the environment that has received these immigrants and how, through this dynamic contact, Guatemalans and Salvadorans have created community amid the vastness of metropolitan Los Angeles, often as a side effect of other activities. In the process of reconstructing their lives, these immigrants have contributed to the revitalization of deteriorating neighborhoods, fueled the area with economic activities, and enriched the cultural life of the region. Through these activities in the United States, these actors also have forged change in origin communities. For this reason, this well-written book should be of interest not only to those concerned with immigration, but to a much broader audience interested in coalition building, labor organizing, and community formation.

Theoretically, the authors start with the notion that structural conditions and global economic restructuring have constrained immigrants' actions and have also shaped economic opportunities for immigrants as well as social and political receptivity in the receiving context. Although these conditions influence heavily immigrants' actions, they do not determine them altogether, since it is through their activities that immigrants have reshaped and transformed both the conditions that receive them and their origin societies. This approach emphasizes the dynamic interplay between structure and agency.

Throughout the book, we see how immigrants are reshaping the urban environment in which they now live. An important area where this takes place is in the sectors of the economy where these immigrants work, such as the garment industry, building maintenance, domestic work, street vending, and day labor. This discussion contains many details about Central Americans' incorporation, high participation rates in these sectors, and the situation of these workers. But importantly, it also demonstrates how these immigrants are transforming the conditions of work in these sectors.