



Chavez, L. (2012). *Shadowed lives: Undocumented immigrants in American society* (3rd Ed.). Fort Worth: Cengage Learning.

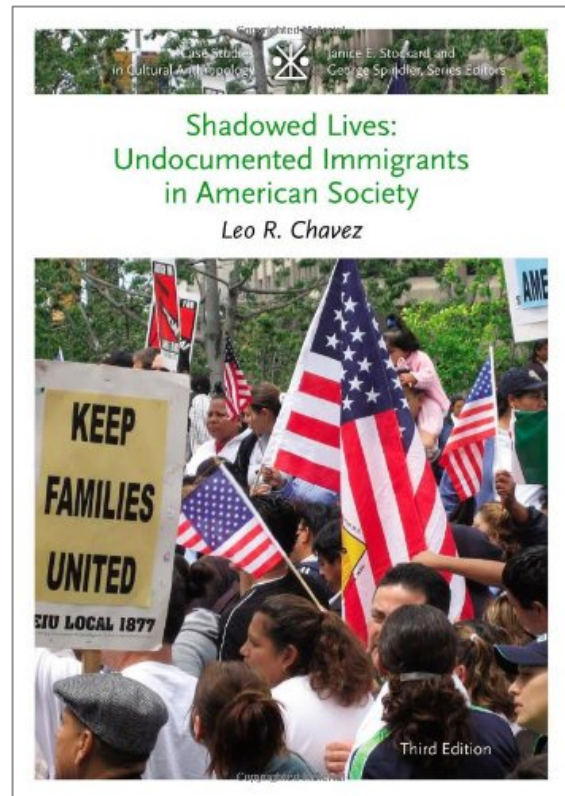
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The narrative of immigrant experience can easily be essentialized to overly simplistic stories and broad generalizations when told from a third person's point of view. In *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*, Leo Chavez prefaces his ethnography by revealing his academic and personal interests in Mexican migration, which gives the read a solid balance of expository data accompanied by a humanizing narrative. His desire to update and produce the latest edition stems from some of the 21st century realities surrounding immigration, which includes the economic boom that gave rise to demand for immigrant labor in the late 1990s, the immigrant marches of 2006, the DREAM act, and the post 9/11 reaction from anti-newcomer vigilante groups such as the Minutemen Project in Arizona.

Chavez divides the book into three sections, which correspond to the physical and emotional journey that is immigration from one's homeland to the US. The first describes the separation that an individual or group must make from Mexico and problematizes employment as the presumed motivator. Family history, conflicts, adventure, and curiosity are but a few of the alternative reasons embedded in the stories reported in this section.



Once escorted through the departure narratives of these individuals, Chavez arrives at the second transitory or “liminal” stage. He argues that upon crossing the border, immigrants begin their physical and symbolic transition from one way of life to another. Chavez chronicles his own experiences riding along with Border Patrol agents, depicts the risks involved for immigrants in crossing, and retells the tragic stories of those killed along the way. The final section of *Shadowed Lives* focuses on incorporation. Commonly referred to as “assimilation” in educational contexts, he looks at what way and to what degree immigrants are integrated or denied entry into U.S. communities. Chavez highlights makeshift housing encampments, street corner employment, demolition of housing, and the quest for secure documentation as factors that have the potential to dehumanize the members of the Mexican immigrant community.

Although the book is primarily geared to an anthropological audience, the implications reach far beyond this field. Educators working with migrant populations would benefit greatly by discussing the perspective the author offers regarding the lives of the individuals with whom he came into contact. Understanding the uniqueness of each family's journey has implications for instructional styles and approach, interactional rapport between institution of learning and families, the harnessing of multiple intelligences, as well as other advantages for both teacher and student. Currently *Shadowed Lives* lacks a section recommending ways that public or community educators might break social stigmas surrounding immigration and facilitate immigrants' incorporation as respected members of American society.

By the same token, *Shadowed Lives* serves as a rich resource for researchers in the social sciences. Chavez employs multiple methodologies, allowing the reader to examine his observations, data, structured and unstructured personal interviews, as well as his participation in several social events. Although the book focuses on Mexican immigration, one section relates the experiences of some Central American immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Within their anecdotal journeys, Chavez shares how they endure the accompanying challenges associated with passage through Mexico

before arriving to the US. Because this section is abbreviated, Chavez opens the narrative for future researchers interested in this field to pursue investigations of Latino-immigrant experiences.

In a similar way, *Shadowed Lives* could serve as a practical tool for policy makers as it pertains to immigration. Educational decisions, government funding, housing, naturalization laws, and undocumented labor list only a few of the hot-button issues that have far-reaching significance in U.S. society. Reading about the effects of anti-immigrant initiative such as Proposition 187 (1994) and HR 4437 (2005) imposed on productive members of the U.S. economy, not to mention on family's daily realities, could serve as powerful testimonies to channel a new potential bilingual student generation coming up in the United States. Ultimately, people involved in bureaucratic or legislative decision-making positions could gain a more nuanced view of immigrants and immigration.

Finally, as Chavez accomplishes this work first as an anthropologist, he is next a storyteller, and finally, an advocate. In light of the nativist anti-immigrant sentiment, Chavez cites several instances of political propaganda attempting to advance the notion of undocumented individuals being a threat to the nation. By studying the trends and being aware of the present-day anti-Latino advocates that Chavez mentions in this book, pro-Latino activists might be able to widen their lens to keep history from repeating itself.

As the title suggests, Chavez illustrates out that once having crossed the border into U.S. society, many immigrants must conduct their lives in the shadows. He illuminates some of their motives through the lens of the well-articulated idea that many individuals head north in hopes of reaching a notion of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community," and that the journey north geographically also signifies upward mobility economically and socially as well. Lamentably, not only do many of them not find that utopian world that they seek, they encounter oppositional attitudes, poor living conditions, and few options to better their situations. With more publications such as this one that generate dialogue that potentially give way to decision making at a policy level, these lives having to be conducted in the shadows may one day be brought into the light.

## References

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Mitch taught third grade for ten years as a general ed., bilingual ed., and dual language teacher in south Austin. He holds a master's degree in Spanish from Texas State University as well as a bachelor's in Spanish from UT Austin. While currently working on his doctoral studies in bilingual/bicultural education, he is a TA and campus facilitator for bilingual pre-service teachers. His present research interest includes humor as a bilingual teaching tool and he is passionate about the different linguistic varieties of the Spanish-speaking world.

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