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Flores, A. (2021). *The succeeders: How immigrant youth are transforming what it means to belong in America.* University of California Press.

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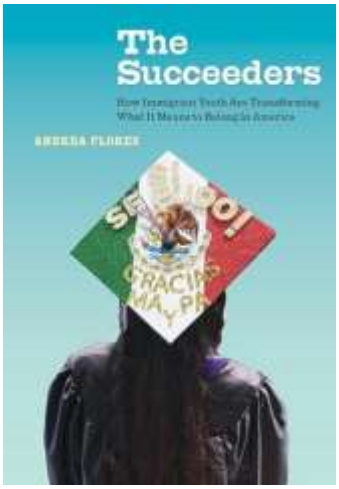

Anthropologist Andrea Flores's first book, *The Succeeders: How Immigrant Youth Are Transforming What It Means to Belong in America*, offers a qualitative study on the value of education for present and future generations of Latinos living in the United States, as experienced and envisioned by high school youth in and around Nashville, Tennessee. The youth, who the author describes as the Succeeders, were all participants in a nonprofit college access program. "Mostly from low-income Mexican and Central American families," they were on the cusp of becoming the first in their families to both graduate from high school and consider college in their immediate futures (p. 1).

The study was conducted in the previous decade, the bulk of which took place over a 12-month period in 2012 and 2013. Subsequent to this fieldwork, Flores returned almost every January and summer and, from 2015 and 2017, the author conducted follow-up interviews with participants intermittently. Approximately 31 formal interviews formed the basis of the author's analysis, 13 of which were with male participants and 18 with female participants. Apart from these formal interviews, Flores engaged with participant observation that involved immersing and participating in program-related activities and more. These activities ranged from attending regular after-school program meetings to being invited to community events like soccer games and family parties. The ethnographic approach employed in this work, according to the author, "enabled me to see how students navigated the college application process, the end of high school, and their personal lives" (p. 25).

The crux of this study centered on how the Succeeders viewed education as a way to negotiate their own sense of belonging within the larger complex and contradictory racialized histories of inclusion and exclusion that is the United States. School, in turn, became an important site of striving for youth to prove their own exceptionality and belonging to the nation. In the third chapter, as one example,

Flores notes how participants echoed what she describes as the "model minority" narrative, which "conforms to U.S.-specific assumptions regarding how 'good,' and therefore successful, minorities behave and act" (p. 84). Being "good" Latinos, in turn, necessitated and perpetuated negative and often dehumanizing perceptions about "bad" Latinos in popular culture and political discourse. This positionality was expressed in different ways. At one point, the author describes observing multiple skits performed by students during program meetings. Frequently, the author notes how students juxtaposed the use of standard English and "ghetto" style English—which involved "features such as double negatives and teeth sucking" (p. 87). By engaging in the former, the students showed that they were responsible and deserving minorities. In turn, they were rewarded in the skits with incentives such as tutoring and extra credit. Language became a critical marker to prove their own worth and inclusion.

In chapters four and five, as another example, Flores demonstrates the ways in which Succeeders sought to accentuate their own achievements in school as a testament to the love and care of their parents, siblings, families, and respective communities. Their families and especially their parents—and Latinos at large—are not threats to the nation. On the contrary, they are "*buena gente*," meaning "well-mannered, kind, trustworthy people of upstanding moral behavior and standards" (p. 129). In this way, the Succeeders help remake and expand notions of success and belonging from an individual to a collective affirmation. In the sixth and final chapter, Flores shows how this same family-making ethos was embodied in the small acts of care and support that Succeeders showed toward one another.

Overall, this work contributes to the growing literature on the role of education for Latinos in the United States. *The Succeeders* is particularly insightful for understanding the role of education for Latino immigrant youth in new destination cities in the Southeast United States, during a period of heightened political nativism in the nation.

About the Reviewer

Antonio Vásquez is an assistant professor at Augsburg University and an interdisciplinary scholar who teaches introductory and advanced courses in Latinx studies. He received the Alba Ortiz Faculty Teaching Excellence Award in 2022 at the University of Texas at Austin. Antonio holds a Ph.D. in Chicano/Latino studies and American studies, a graduate certificate in community engagement, an M.A. in international relations, and a B.A. in political science and international studies. He recently facilitated the creation of a four-year student-led community archive called Testimonios de Mexican American and Latina/o Studies. Other past projects with students include Proyecto Conciencia and Migration with Dignity in Middle Tennessee. He is currently working on a book that examines the emergence of farmworker organizing and community activism in the southern United States. Antonio is a first-generation college graduate and a product of the public education system in Southeast San Antonio, Texas.

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