

## Editor's Preface to Special Issue on "Gender and Intimacy across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands"

---

This special issue is the outgrowth of the "Gender and Intimacy across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands" conference held on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2016. Over two-and-a-half days, established scholars and graduate students came together to explore the theme of the conference (and the title of this special issue). It was in the build up to this conference that the organizers, Miroslava Chávez-García and Verónica Castillo-Muñoz suggested that these papers might have the makings of a special issue. Like most conferences that become edited volumes or special issues, the number of presenters was rather large, and this journal owes a debt of gratitude to Chávez-García and Castillo-Muñoz for managing this project in a conscientious and professional way from conference planning, through peer review, and final edits. The resulting special issue is the product of these amazing efforts.

While the introduction does a great job of making clear the contributions of the individual authors, let me just say that these articles when taken as a whole provide many avenues for consideration and reconceptualization of borderlands studies. Some questions come to mind after reading these articles, and I will address some of them in the paragraphs to follow.

In "Staging Crossings" Celeste Menchaca explores the operation of the board of special inquiry (BSI), which considered whether specific women immigrants were "likely to become a public charge," and the ways these women performed identities and put forward narratives meant to allow for their entry into the United States. Reading this fascinating study, I wondered what the BSI process looked like for Asian immigrants on the West Coast, or for Eastern and Southern European immigrants on the East Coast. What expectations did those BSI officials have, and what strategies did other immigrant women deploy in their efforts to gain entry to the United States? I also

wondered what other nation states did when it came to “public charge” review, given that the early twentieth century was an era of immigration restriction in Australia, France, and many other nations. Did these other immigration regimes seek to exclude those likely to become a “public charge,” and were there hearings where petitioners could make their case? Menchaca’s well-researched, well-written article should serve as a jumping off point for scholars in other fields to consider how borders were regulated and how immigrants responded to the ever-changing administrative regimes of immigration restriction.

The two other articles share some ties that certainly provide grounds for future study and consideration. While considering the great diversity of family histories and pathways of migration and acculturation in California and the Americas, these two studies show us how the intimate histories of families over time and space often do not fit the often rigid outlines of race, nation, and gender specificity, but rather are shaped by the ever-changing dynamics of conquest, migration, state regimes, and opportunity seeking. These forces of change also bring different people together as families form and reform across space and territory. Erika Pérez, in “The Dalton-Zamoranos” shows how families were as fluid as the boundaries of empire in the nineteenth century, how bi-ethnic families confronted these changes, and how—in an increasingly intolerant California—they found opportunity in Central America where a bi-ethnic background among elites would have been common rather than extraordinary. This article raises questions about the fate of many bi-ethnic families in the Southwest after the conquest and also about the process of mobility in more recent times in California, which has one of the largest bi-ethnic communities in the United States. Histories of families such as the Dalton-Zamoranos need to be more fully fleshed out by other historians and Pérez provides a useful model for doing this work. In “Intimacy and Family in the California Borderlands,” Margie Brown-Coronel shows, through the personal letters of Josefa del Valle-Forster, how another bi-ethnic family confronted the conquest that brought with it radical changes in status, gender dynamics, and prosperity. In Brown-Coronel’s telling we see that a dynamic Californiana who intermarries with an Anglo businessman is able to maintain, and expand, her family’s landholdings and status in California. With her education and work ethic we see del Valle-Forster making her way east to Chicago where she is able to embrace social relationships with other Catholics (Italians in particular) and also to question the World’s Fair’s depiction of Californians. The history of the *Californios* is as

complex as Albert Camarillo demonstrated forty years ago in *Chicanos in a Changing Society*. By examining these changes through the personal, familial, and intimate lenses of family, marriage, and business we see how fluid the boundaries of empire and change could be, even as families responded with dynamism and cohesion to revolutionary change. This insight led me to wonder how bi-ethnic families in early twentieth-century Los Angeles adapted, or the bi-ethnic families of Ventura or San Diego counties the late twentieth century. The great diversity of “Mexican” or “Chicanx” family life needs just this sort of exploration from Texas to California and beyond. These two articles show us how this might be done.

This special issue, we hope, answers as many questions as it raises, as it showcases new and innovative work and ways of considering gender and intimacy on the borderlands. It is always a pleasure to publish such thought-provoking works. ■

---

MARC S. RODRIGUEZ is the editor of *Pacific Historical Review* and a professor of history at Portland State University.