Review: *«Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos»* [From the American Dream to the American Nightmare. Mexican Immigration in the United States] by Ismael García Castro.

[English version]

«Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos» de Ismael García Castro. Reseña

Resenha de *«Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos»* [Do sonho ao pesadelo americano. Imigração mexicana nos Estados Unidos] de Ismael García Castro

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Abstract

In his work «*Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos*» [From the American Dream to the American Nightmare. Mexican Immigration in the United States], Ismael García Castro examines the complex situation of migrant communities and ethnic minorities, as well as their prospects. Using a historical and hermeneutical approach, it analyzes the political discourses and contexts in which migration policies have been formulated and executed in the United States, with special attention to those that affect communities of Mexican origin. Through a critical lens, the author examines the historical, social, and political impacts of the

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xenophobic, utilitarian, pragmatic, and dehumanized migration policies implemented by that nation throughout its history. García Castro reviews the key events, laws, and discourses that have justified the exclusion and exploitation of Mexican migrant labor, revealing how the immigration system has operated as a mechanism of social and economic control. Based on the reading of this work, the hypothesis is proposed regarding the historical formation of an industry of undocumentedness, supported by: 1) the construction of a false enemy and 2) the myth of migrant invasion, along with the defense of identity and the border as a symbolic instrument, which constitute the main «products» of this industry.

Keywords: United States; xenophobia; utilitarianism; undocumented migration; Mexicans.

Resumen

En su obra «Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos», Ismael García Castro examina la compleja situación de las comunidades migrantes y minorías étnicas, así como sus perspectivas a futuro. Utilizando un enfoque histórico y hermenéutico, analiza los discursos políticos y los contextos en los que se han formulado y ejecutado las políticas migratorias en Estados Unidos, con especial atención a las que afectan a las comunidades de origen mexicano. A través de un lente crítico, el autor examina los impactos históricos, sociales y políticos de las políticas migratorias xenófobas, utilitarias, pragmáticas y deshumanizadas implementadas por dicha nación a lo largo de su historia. García Castro revisa los eventos clave, leyes y discursos que han justificado la exclusión y explotación de la mano de obra migrante mexicana, revelando cómo el sistema migratorio ha operado como un mecanismo de control social y económico. A partir de la lectura de esta obra, se plantea la hipótesis de la formación histórica de una industria de la indocumentalidad, sustentada en: 1) la construcción de un falso enemigo y 2) el mito de la invasión migrante, junto con la defensa de la identidad y la frontera como instrumento simbólico, los cuales constituyen los principales «productos» de dicha industria.

Palabras clave: Estados Unidos; xenofobia; utilitarismo; migración indocumentada; mexicanos.

Resumo

Em sua obra «*Del sueño a la pesadilla americana. Inmigración mexicana en Estados Unidos*» [Do sonho ao pesadelo americano. Imigração mexicana nos Estados Unidos], Ismael García Castro examina a complexa situação das comunidades migrantes e minorias étnicas, bem como suas perspectivas para o futuro. Utilizando uma abordagem histórica e hermenêutica, o autor analisa os discursos políticos e os contextos nos quais foram formuladas e implementadas as políticas migratórias nos Estados Unidos, com especial atenção às que afetam as comunidades de origem mexicana. Por meio de uma lente crítica, García Castro investiga os impactos históricos, sociais e políticos das políticas migratórias xenófobas, utilitárias, pragmáticas e desumanizadas adotadas por essa nação ao longo de sua história. O autor revisa eventos-chave, legislações e discursos que justificaram a exclusão e exploração da força de trabalho migrante mexicana, revelando como o sistema migratório tem operado como um mecanismo de controle social e econômico. A partir da leitura dessa obra, propõe-se a hipótese da formação histórica de uma indústria da indocumentalidade, sustentada em: 1) a construção de um falso inimigo e 2) o mito da invasão migratória, juntamente com a defesa da identidade e da fronteira como instrumento simbólico, que constituem os principais "produtos" dessa indústria.

Palavras-chave: Estados Unidos; xenofobia; utilitarismo; migração indocumentada; mexicanos.

Ismael García Castro's book (2024) is part of the broad tradition of studies on migration and transnationalism, which have been a characteristic of consolidated researchers in our country. It is a critical work that presents a historical journey from 1776, the year in which the independence of the United States was proclaimed, to 2024, when the presidential term of Joe Biden ends, and the contest for the presidency between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump grabs the attention of the country. Throughout its 279 pages, structured in seven chapters, the author examines in detail

> [...] the historical background, contexts, and impacts of legislation and government actions in the United States regarding the arrival and presence of immigrants, particularly of the undocumented population of Mexican origin, from the formation of the American nation to the present day. (p. 36).

García Castro also addresses the analysis of the impacts of the migratory phenomenon today, emphasizing the political debate generated by the growing polarization and violence towards the irregular immigrant population. This violence has become a constant danger and has increased particularly against those who come from certain countries, highlighting immigration from Mexico and Central American countries. The author points out that this has led to a system of migration based on utilitarian pragmatism, exclusion, and ethnocentrism (p. 39), which results in the constant violation of human rights due to the racial profiling prevalent in the implementation of migration policies. This system affects not only irregular migrants but also citizens, who can be detained solely on suspicion of migratory irregularity, based on their physical appearance. In addition, it has significant repercussions for the families of detainees, who face the constant threat of separation due to deportation proceedings.

The analysis presented in this paper constitutes an essential and urgent reading, both for students and for academics interested in the US immigration system, as well as for those responsible for formulating public policies. Furthermore, it is essential for those seeking to understand the foundations of American liberalism—a system characterized by granting social, political, and civil rights based on citizenship. This debate permeates all presidential administrations, which often adjust their rhetoric depending on the political gains at stake.

In turn, this work critically examines fundamental concepts and doctrines that have been present since the founding of the United States and remain influential today. These have played a crucial role in promoting values associated with the "greatness" of the United States such as the myth of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny (p. 41). Throughout history, its premises have served to justify practices such as the extermination and dispossession of native nations,

the importation of African slaves, as well as the exclusion and subjugation of Mexican, Chinese, and Central American migrant labor, among other abuses.

This analysis reveals, on the one hand, that the potential of power has always been implicit in the actions of the United States, and, on the other, that the power of the North American nation has been based on a historical system of human exploitation of migrant labor. This is illustrated in Chapter I, where the concept of 'racial scripts' proposed by Molina (cited in García, 2024) is explored, among other theories. According to this concept, in racial categorization, the issue of power is always at stake. Once these categories or "racial scripts" are formed, they are transferred to other groups, consolidating and perpetuating structures of domination and exclusion that affect various populations over time. This means, according to García (2024), that

> [...] the deep racial hierarchy and exclusion embodied in the social, political, and legal system of the United States, to this day, reveals the need to recruit, permanently, an external labor force to maintain the capitalist expansion of the country that has prevailed, over the ideological aspiration to maintain a supposed racial purity or to achieve cultural homogeneity. (p. 38).

From Benjamin Franklin, in 1755 (p. 42), to Donald Trump (Chapter VII) in his two presidential campaigns, speeches have been used to feed fear and contempt for "the other", especially towards the brown-skinned migrant; this came to signify the "Hispanic challenge" (p. 54) so much proclaimed by Samuel Huntington. In their far-right populist demagoguery, these speeches defend Anglo-Saxon supremacism, promoting a narrative of exclusion and dehumanization of immigrants, which has been used as a political tool to mobilize sectors of the population based on fear and xenophobia. In this way, Ismael García Castro enters into the exhausting hermeneutic task of describing the "true American" (p. 73); that is, the North American essence, in a context where the foreigner has no place, and which reflects the motto of "America for Americans", extremely present in the measures imposed by Donald Trump.

Scrutiny moves towards the author's position, which stipulates that pragmatism, utilitarianism, and xenophobia (p. 124) constitute the main pillars of this historically racialized migration system. This argument is objectified through various historical events, framed in Chapter II, such as the American Constitution of 1787, the first Naturalization Law of 1790, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and the American Civil War, a period that laid the foundations of the migratory legal framework and that was constituted, essentially, as a "[...] labor supply system, indispensable for the economic and territorial expansion of the country" (p. 82).

Re view

The twentieth century, marked by the First World War, the Great Depression of 1929 and the Second World War, presented two different scenarios: on the one hand, the doors to migration were closed during the Great Crisis, while, on the other, the Bracero Program and other measures promoted the dynamization of the labor market, particularly that of the agricultural sector and that, nevertheless, was a labor force that once recovered the economy sought to be discarded in a petty way (Chapter III). The 21st century, on the other hand, is characterized by the change in the profile of the migrant (p. 185) and the attacks on the Twin Towers in September 2001, as a result of which the militarization of the US border was reinforced, which would later be accompanied by the crisis of 2008 (Chapter VII).

In a transversal way, in each of these periods, the author has scrutinized more than a hundred anti-immigrant laws, which arose from the xenophobic positions adopted by different presidents and local governments. Understanding the legal framework and the local and national political context in which they were created helps to establish the complex and different socio-spatial nuances, which is an essential task, that García Castro addresses rigorously to avoid possible hermeneutical biases. In his extensive reflection, the author clearly states that migrant labor has supported American finances by invigorating and stimulating the labor market, particularly during periods of expansionism and war. However, this workforce has been used as a scapegoat by both politicians and the media, which in the management of post-truth have tended to blame them for the evils that afflict the United States and have used that anti-immigrant rhetoric as an electoral bargaining chip.

The criminalization of migration, particularly of undocumented migrants of Mexican origin, has served the interests of both political and business elites. Based on the analyses presented in García Castro's work, this review hypothesizes that the United States has fostered an "industry of undocumentedness", whose characteristics are described below, taking as a reference the review of this editorial novelty; namely:

- Garcia highlights the **historical construction of a false enemy**: Several presidents have used pseudoscientific claims based on Darwinism and eugenics (p. 100), phrases from organic ideologues of white supremacy such as Peter Brimelow (p. 164) and Patrick Buchanan. The latter, author of the phrase "Put America First" (p. 177) presents the migrant, especially the undocumented, as a threat. This is configured as the main characteristic by which the United States justifies subsequent actions in its immigration policy.

- **The myth of the migrant invasion, the defense of identity, and the border as a symbolic instrument as the main products of the undocumented industry**: the author criticizes the myth of the migrant invasion, called a "chronic moral illness" (p. 165), a media and political construction. In this logic of invasion, the border stands as a symbolic instrument (p. 223) that delimits the imaginary confines of American identity and is given budgetary priority. Only in the periods of 1929-1933 was the budget for the Border Patrol doubled to increase surveillance efforts to prevent the passage of irregular immigrants, especially at the southern border (pp. 118-119). Subsequently, between 1978 and 1988, the budget of this government agency quadrupled (Chap. VI). In these almost 60 years, the main objective was the expulsion of migrants who were already in the United States. In the period from 1993 to 2001, under the mandate of Bill Clinton, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service (ICE) was granted twice as much budget as its predecessor, allocating 800 million, and increasing by 117% the number of Border Patrol officers on the border with Mexico (Cap VI). Migration policy consisted not only of expulsion but also of deterrence. Donald Trump, for his part, also carried out large deportations, including DACA recipients (p. 245). All of this has been done even though, in reality, there is no tangible threat endangering this identity. García provides strong evidence to disprove the myth of the invasion, as an example of this is that although "[...] the budget of the immigration agencies of the US Government has multiplied in the last two decades [...] the number of detentions of undocumented immigrants has remained stable, even decreased significantly since 2005" (p. 194).

In this sense, it is possible to argue that the «undocumented industry» works similarly to any other industry, generating artificial needs designed to meet the interests of key actors such as the ICE, the Border Patrol, employers, arms suppliers, and far-right conservative voters.

The economic greatness of the United States is sustained by the migrant population, especially the undocumented, which generates large profits for companies that have historically employed Mexican workers without any guarantee of their working conditions, maintaining low wages (p. 126) and with difficulties in forming unions (p. 162). In this sense, the United States finds it usefully convenient to perpetuate undocumented status, since it maintains a vulnerable workforce that favors business and political interests, which are sometimes combined.

In conclusion, the author urges to maintain a balanced perspective in the face of the change of governments, particularly the Democrats, who, despite their

apparent reformist intentions, have implemented strict deportation policies; as evidenced in the administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. However, we must not succumb to defeat either, as social movements, such as the "Dreamer Movement", have made significant progress, although they currently face organizational challenges that must be overcome.

The work clearly demonstrates that the American justice system is meritocratic; therefore, migrant communities must continue striving for greater inclusion (p. 278). From this work, the author could explore two possible lines of research: On the one hand, the study of Trumpism as an ultraconservative movement and its implications for migration policies; on the other, the proposal of a scheme that, beyond immigration reform, seeks to guarantee the protection of the fundamental rights of the migrant population.

References

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