



Introduction

Democracy and Freedom

Beneath the hysteria being generated around immigration, intertwined in the neighborhoods creating draconian anti-immigration laws, reside millions of individuals of Mexican descent who are working hard, supporting families, and supporting community growth. The stories of these individuals, however, are seldom represented. Rather, images of conservative talk show host Sean Hannity on horseback, chasing “wetbacks,” seem to dominate the airways.

The scholars, activists, and organizations represented in this issue of *Reflections*, however, demonstrate how to counter this dominant narrative, showing us both the dignity of the individual and the possibility of collective action. In the opening pages, Jesús Villicaña López, Margarita Rojas, and Salvador García share their personal experiences of crossing the border and establishing a new life in the United States. This personal experience is then drawn into dialogue with the work of the Minnesota Immigration Freedom Network and University of Minnesota’s Chicano Studies Program. The case of Maria Gonzales, who is trying to complete her education, is represented and embedded within university attempts at Fairfield University and Emerson College to broaden a commitment to the educational rights of all students. Octavio Pimentel and Victor Villanueva then remind us that any sense of “education” or “success” must grow in dialogue with the values and traditions of the communities themselves. The issue of *Reflections* then ends as it began. Through the work of Mark Lyons, whose oral history project provides a venue for immigrants to speak about their experience in their own words, we listen to the personal experience of individuals from different heritages and origins creating a life in the United States.



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Steve Parks
Editor, *Reflections*



Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows

Mark Lyons, Introduction to excerpts from *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows*

It is time for Latino immigrants in the United States to take back their stories—stories that have been rewritten by people in a campaign to drive them out of the United States. The revised stories read in the press and heard on the streets, promulgated by mayors and legislators and citizens who have a vision of America the Way It Used to Be, go something like this: our towns are being taken over by brown-skinned immigrants who drive our crime rate up and overwhelm the criminal justice system; these immigrants drain our economy, sucking our resources for schools, healthcare and welfare programs; they take away jobs from Americans and drive our wages down; they don't really want to be American—they stick to themselves, won't learn English, and are only here to take advantage of our way of life while refusing to contribute to it; and now, post 9/11, they are a terrorist threat. Citizens, we are being invaded; take back your communities before it's too late.

One problem: the stories are not true. It would take many pages to refute these claims—and that's not the purpose of this article—but the claims are simply not true. In *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows, Oral Histories of Mexican Farmworkers and Their Families*, immigrants have their chance to set the story straight. The truth is reflected more accurately in the story of Jesús Villicaña López, age 16, who picks mushrooms over 80 hours a week and lives in one room with eighteen other men to support his family back home. Or the story of Margarita Rojas, who worked three jobs to support her family and faces deportation in spite of being married to an American citizen. Or Salvador Garcia, who lived separated from his