

Tereza Novotná

B.A. Dissertation Assessment

2010

**Immigration to the U.S. through the Mexican Perspective: Examining the Push Factors before and after NAFTA**

Tereza Novotná has chosen to write her B.A. dissertation on Mexican immigration to the United States before and after NAFTA. This is both an admirable and relevant topic for anyone wishing to understand the present-day United States. Kryštof Kozák is the foremost expert on Mexico at the Faculty of Social Sciences and it is therefore appropriate that he is the supervisor of Tereza's dissertation.

The work is very well presented and contains a number of illustrative charts and graphs. In a study of this type, such an illustrative display of data certainly is commendable. Tereza has divided the treatise into an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion. The bibliography is organized well and the crucial distinction between primary and secondary sources is made. True to her generation, Tereza has utilized online sources in addition to printed ones.

As far as the content of the study is concerned, Tereza spells out in the introduction that her aim is to examine the "push factors" underlying Mexican migration to the United States and the relationship between these factors and the NAFTA agreement. In order to accomplish this goal, Tereza has opted to compare and contrast Mexican immigration in the periods before and after the NAFTA agreement came into force. As there is plenty of source material dealing with the subject at hand, Tereza offers an analysis of the main sources consulted. This is laudable.

Chapter 1 addresses the overall issue of Mexican immigration to the United States. The chapter describes various aspects of Mexican immigration and

provides an historical overview as well as the Mexican and American expectations of NAFTA.

Chapter 2 analyzes in detail the economic and political changes in Mexico that took place in the 1980s and early 1990s and their impact on immigration to the United States. Tereza depicts what the economic situation was like in both the rural (agricultural) and industrial (mainly petroleum) sectors. In a nutshell, both Presidents de la Madrid and Salinas, respectively, moved to open up the Mexican economy after decades of inefficient state ownership and protectionism. The corruption of the ruling party (PRI), however, made things seem better than they were and once NAFTA came into effect, the Mexican people would experience one of their worst economic crises ever. Tereza rightly points out that the PRI had kept its grip on power for over seventy years and that meaningful opposition began to emerge on a regional level only in the 1990s. Despite this, the chapter concludes by indicating that economic reasons and the legalization of millions of illegal Mexican immigrants by the United States in 1986 played more of a role in encouraging immigration than did political corruption.

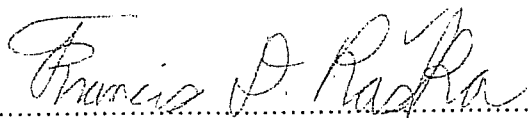
Chapter 3 discusses changes in Mexico after the implementation of NAFTA and push factors for Mexican migration to the United States. Tereza correctly writes that there is no easy answer to the question of what NAFTA did or did not accomplish for the Mexican economy. I tend to concur that although NAFTA did increase trade and investment, it did not meet expectations with regard to employment and wages in Mexico. Politically, Mexico did not become a democratic society even though the PRI lost power in 2000. Armed uprisings (especially the Zapatista movement), contested election results, drug wars, and an increase in crime were matters of concern. NAFTA itself cannot be said to have slowed the number of

immigrants from Mexico, but other factors such as economic conditions in the United States, lower Mexican fertility rates, and increased border security after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have slowed the inflow of migrants at times. One must also keep in mind that more Mexicans have opted to stay in the United States rather than go back and forth. However, the total number of immigrants present in American society has risen over the past decade nonetheless. Violence and drug wars can be seen as the latest push factors for migration in addition to the ones present before NAFTA was enacted.

Chapter 4 analyzes the changing characteristics of Mexican immigrants. I find it fascinating that the number of single women coming across to the United States has risen dramatically compared to before. Also, the more permanent nature of the migration in recent years is indeed a change.

In the conclusion, Tereza recapitulates her main points and states that the main reason for fluctuating levels of Mexican migration to the United States are demand for labor in the United States and the Mexican desire to earn better wages than those available in Mexico. NAFTA itself did not decrease immigration because it was not designed to do so and wages in Mexico have fallen rather than increased.

Tereza Novotná has produced a fine B.A. dissertation. She has done her research well and made convincing arguments. I recommend that she receive an **EXCELLENT** mark for her efforts.



Doc. PhDr. Francis D. Raška, PhD.