

Coleman, Sarah R. *The Walls Within: The Politics of Immigration in Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021: 253 pages. Hard Copy, \$35.00.

Immigration politics in the United States are fiercely contested. As Sarah R. Coleman writes in *The Walls Within*, these arguments extend well beyond the permeability of national borders and into the realms of state and federal policy. Two key points in immigration history bookend this study. The first is the passage of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which had a significant impact on immigration patterns into the U.S. and its racial composition. The second point is the increasing contestation over the enforcement of immigration laws in the 1990s and early 2000s. These developments in immigration policy occurred within an evolving political-economic context and informed broader disputes over the welfare state, federalism, and citizenship.

This monograph's six chapters (in addition to an introduction and conclusion) are organized around a central question: "to what extent would noncitizen immigrants receive the rights given to U.S. citizens?" (p. 2) The first two chapters focus on the issue of unauthorized immigrants' access to public education in the 1970s and 1980s. While much of Coleman's research centers on governmental actors—including state and federal judiciaries, the legislative branch, and Carter and Reagan administrations—legal advocacy groups played important roles in these matters. On the one hand, East Texas Legal Services and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund challenged state laws that restricted unauthorized immigrants' access to public education. In many ways, these nongovernmental organizations approached this work as an extension of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand, the conservative Mountain States Legal Foundation characterized the subject as a matter best left to the states. These cases culminated in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1982 *Plyler* decision which struck down the Texas laws on the grounds they violated the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

The *Plyler* case, Coleman tells us, was political as much as it was legal. It compelled the Carter and Reagan administrations (and their presidential campaigns) to take public positions on immigration and entitlements. By the mid-1980s, unemployment forced the topic of employer sanctions onto a national stage. For decades, organized labor had advocated for legislation to penalize employers that hired unauthorized immigrants. However, a strange combination of bedfellows, including the Chamber of Commerce and United Farm Workers, frustrated the Carter administration's attempts to secure it. The UFW had reversed its earlier stance in support of sanctions while the Chamber of Commerce criticized the burden they would put on employers. In a thorough examination of federal policymaking, Coleman argues that concerns over electoral politics influenced the composition and passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). President Reagan attempted to thread a needle by placating those who demanded restricting immigration while, at the same time, minimizing the terms under which noncitizens could sue employers for discrimination. "Republican politicians were also negotiating with the strength of this new restrictionist movement and the growing Latino vote, but ultimately the Reagan administration prioritized its free market base over both the growing restrictionist sentiment and cementing Latino outreach efforts," Coleman explains (p. 103). Careful attention to the differences and divisions among lawmakers, especially conservatives, is a major strength of *The Walls Within*.

The latter two chapters bring this study into recent history. The penultimate chapter will be of interest to scholars of welfare reform. Here, Coleman connects the influence of restrictionists in the states with the evolution of the Democratic and Republican parties in the 1990s. In 1996, President Clinton signed two bills into law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant

Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), that reflected the interests of vocal constituencies, especially critics of welfare and opponents of immigration. Many of the loudest voices were in border states such as California, Texas, and Arizona but, increasingly, they also emanated from interior states like Iowa and Utah. Throughout the U.S., state and local officials' attempts to deal with unauthorized immigrants raised questions about immigration federalism and the enforcement of applicable laws.

The Walls Within is an excellent intervention in immigration studies and recent U.S. history. Its focus on federal and state policy gives it a "top-down" perspective. Coleman concludes that the 1990s were a "pivotal decade" with regard to immigration politics. Immigrants' access to many basic rights became contingent on citizenship as opposed to mere residency. This shift, at the same time, was part of a larger sea change in political economy and public policy that had significant consequences for citizens and noncitizens. Neoliberal restructuring caused widespread hardship on working and middle-class people, and created fertile ground for anti-immigrant sentiment. Welfare reform advocates, meanwhile, envisioned a new relationship between citizens and the federal government that prioritized personal responsibility and unfettered free markets. This monograph shows that citizenship and civil rights are *essentially contested concepts* subject to historical change, causation, and contingency.

Regional conflicts and global warming have made immigration a frequent item in public discourse. Coleman's account of the patchwork of local, state, and federal attempts to deal with the problem would lend itself to a comparative analysis of global immigration (as well as resistance to it), particularly within international bodies such as the Arab League and European Union. Refugees seeking respite from war and uprooted agricultural laborers both need work to survive. In many cases, the study of immigration leads to the proverbial labor question: who does

the work and under what terms and circumstances? *The Walls Within* offers a similar question to examine the place of immigrants in the U.S.: who gets to immigrate into this country, and what rights do they have once they are within its borders?

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