

2009

Review of *From Arrival to Incorporation: Migrants to the U.S. in a Global Era*, edited by Elliott R. Barkan, Hasia Diner, and Alan M. Kraut; *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, edited by Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke

Gary W. McDonogh
Bryn Mawr College, gmcdonog@brynmawr.edu

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.brynmawr.edu/cities_pubs

 Part of the [Architecture Commons](#), [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Custom Citation

McDonogh, Gary W. Review of *From Arrival to Incorporation: Migrants to the US in a Global Era*, edited by Elliott R. Barkan, Hasia Diner, and Alan M. Kraut; *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants.*, edited by Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke. *Journal of World History* 20 (2009): 284-288.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College. http://repository.brynmawr.edu/cities_pubs/10

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

ers the “English-only” movement, the erroneous coupling of Latinos with illegal immigrants, post-9/11 hostility toward Arab and Muslim Americans, and the frequent blaming of America’s economic woes on immigrants. But he offers hope in the end, by encouraging us to realize that we are all from someplace else, that “we are in this together.”

In terms of marketing, however, the very strength of this book might also be its main drawback. Given its breadth and length, I do not see this book being assigned in an undergraduate class on immigration history. Instead, I view this book as a “must read” for scholars interested in immigration, racial and ethnic formation, and the development of multiculturalism. It will no doubt have a lasting impact on how they approach and teach those subjects.

K. SCOTT WONG
Williams College

From Arrival to Incorporation: Migrants to the U.S. in a Global Era. Edited by ELLIOTT R. BARKAN, HASIA DINER, and ALAN M. KRAUT. New York: New York University Press, 2007. 320 pp. \$70.00 (cloth); \$23.00 (paper).

Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants. Edited by BRUCE S. ELLIOTT, DAVID A. GERBER, and SUZANNE M. SINKE. New York: Palgrave Macmillan in conjunction with the Carleton Center for the History of Migration, 2006. 320 pp. \$74.95 (cloth).

As immigration debates have heated and ebbed in varied political arenas, long-term global flows have been reduced to a few dimensions, specific groups, or time periods. In his concluding essay in *From Arrival to Incorporation*, the eminent historian Roger Waldinger reminds us that any understanding of migration, cross-cultural communication, and integration demands attention to histories and processes. Within this perspective, these two diverse anthologies should prove useful for scholars and citizens in their commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue, synthesis of data with theory, and creative questions across fields that force us to consider wider implications of immigration, especially in the United States. While the editors diverge in foci—integration and communication through letters, respectively—both collections share a commitment to understanding the present through the past as well as raising new questions for the future.

From Arrival to Incorporation examines many processes involved in settling into U.S. residence and citizenship, with a historical gaze galvanized by events of 9/11 and the role of the nation-state in separating peoples and shaping flows. It offers a mixture of theory, historical methods, quantitative approaches, ethnographies, and commentaries that allow readers to compare articles in useful ways and suggests their utility in multiple settings.

The diversity of migrants and state accommodations permeates the first broad section, beginning with work by David Haines on refugees and the definition of groups who may be admitted to the United States under this special status since World War II. Haines links the issues of moral commitment to data on resettlement and accommodation. The state again resonates in Karen Woodrow-Lafield's overview of the complex choices bridging arrival to citizenship in an article replete with quantitative data on changing patterns of naturalization, again with 9/11 in mind. By contrast, Barry Chiswick and Paul Miller use quantitative measures on ethnic goods and specialization to interpret correlations among lack of language adaptation, enclave space, and low wages. While provocative, this article would profit from further exploration of causes and meaning of ethnic specialization (some of which appear in later ethnographic pieces). Finally, distinguished historian Paul Spickard raises questions about race and religion and their intersections in Eurocentric immigration literature. As he argues, this reduces not only our understanding of race as an overarching feature of controlling boundaries and citizenships but channels readings of themes like religion into certain familiar categories, overlooking complexities of spirituality and worldview. He provides illuminating examples from Japanese and other Asian immigration experiences that reveal race and religion at the heart of history and policy.

The wide-ranging ethnographic case studies of the second section often expand well on these first essays. Anthropologist Caroline Brettell, for example, amplifies and humanizes the enclave hypotheses of Chiswick and Miller by her interesting work on immigrant entrepreneurs and networks of South Asians around Dallas. Barbara Posadas and Roland Guyotte show how gender, class, and personal decisions shape incorporation in a small network of Midwestern Filipino immigrants. Min Zhou and Xiyuan Li raise the issue of language maintenance and assimilation from the viewpoint of histories of Chinese schools, complicating the enclave as well as agency within immigrant communities. Timothy Meagher ends with an enjoyable piece on Italians in twentieth-century American popular culture. These essays localize and humanize processes of incorporation, although one wishes that the

presence of the state might have been clearer in some of this discussion as a unifying argument of the volume as a whole.

The final section brings the immigration debate back to 9/11, where Gary Gerstle, Mehdi Borgmaier, and Anny Bakalian show how this crucial event ripples through U.S. immigration policies, acceptance, and assimilation. These essays, as others in the volume, still stress the wider comparative framework within which we must consider policy and analyses. Hence, Waldinger's notes on the presence of the past bring together these threads of the volume in a warning about not treating the present as an isolate, but as part of a broader set of processes—and lessons.

Many papers are short and exploratory but gain from resonance with others—the initial questions of moral commitment and the state, for example, are recast through the prism of more recent events. While the introductory essay brings these myriad themes together, this is a book that should become even richer in class discussion that grapples with its themes across essays.

Letters across Borders, in fact, achieves more unity from greater geographic and temporal diversity. For many of us, diasporic communication now evokes television, newspapers, and mass media and intimate contact via Internet and cell phones. These make transnational connections immediate but sometimes difficult to analyze because of their fleeting record. This examination of epistolary connections among many immigrant and home populations faces other challenges of data and interpretation, yet the authors bring historical materials to bear on wider questions of migrants and communication in insightful ways. The volume is instructive in its range of methods from quantitative to institutional to textual readings. It also offers a slightly larger scope in cases, reaching across centuries and outside the United States, although it lacks materials from Africa and Asia. At times, though, these texts permit more vivid voices that we actually hear in the first anthology. Thus, as the title of one essay suggests, the collection helps us understand “Every person like a letter” (Markelis).

The introduction by the collective editors and the first few essays in the volume set the stage even for neophyte readers in terms of the difficulties of finding and using letters as keys to the examination of immigrant life, imagery, and communication. Are these only documents of the rich, the literate, the successful, and those who have supportive families in the homeland? Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner tackle the central question of representativeness, given that few letters have survived from millions exchanged. Beginning with more

than seven thousand letters from German archives and careful investigation of biographical and social historical data, they examine who preserved and donated letters as well as those who wrote them. Among the latter, they find slight divergences between letter writers and the general wealth of German immigrants (higher), their places of origin and settlement, and their integration (measured by endogamy); they reassure us that such writers and collections do not seem to be on the fringe and help frame use of these materials in conjunction with other historical questions.

An essay from Eric Richards tackles the limits and possibilities of Australian immigrant letters, which have become a major source for early Australian history. Richards highlights problems and omissions, but also uses individual cases to show how such letters illuminate motivations and fears, patterns of movement, and even working-class mentalities in what they say and do not say. Editor Suzanne Sinke also shows how careful and contextualized reading of letters of immigrants in search of spouses speak to shifting patterns of choice and communication that resonate in Internet matchmaking today. Like Richards, she shows us how to use these materials carefully to gain perspectives over time and across individual cases. Building on this methodological care in a later section on editorial intervention, two other pieces by William Jones and Anna Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann also explore selections and limits in interpreting how published letters speak for Welsh and Polish immigrants, respectively.

Letters have form as well as content. David Fitzpatrick, who has made magisterial use of Irish immigrant letters in reconstructing Australian emigrant life, here provides interesting notes on the shared formalities of such letters. He avoids the temptation to locate the origins of these stylistic flourishes in either Irish folk culture and orality or in models filtered from elite letters, reminding us that “both composition and reception were semi-public events” (p. 105). Form was shaped by practice and imitation. Daiva Markelis expands the social history of letter composition through a historical ethnography of literacy based on the reminiscences of elderly Lithuanian immigrant nuns. Here, Fitzpatrick’s collaborative practices come wonderfully to life in memories of reading and writing, calligraphy and formalities as well as collaboration across illiterate and literate but American generations. Miguel Angel Vargas brings correspondence into the phone era with his review of ninety-one letters from contemporary Mexican immigrants that highlight formalities and formulae (and the continuing influence of writing manuals) as well as the gendering and meanings of literate culture in

a Zacatecan-U.S. community whose 375 families generate three thousand letters a month (p. 133)!

Other essays in this volume tackle omissions in the letters, posing complex arguments in the absence of other data. David Gerber pushes the limits of this elusive question through texts themselves—their apologies, warnings about gossip, and confrontations with past silences. Ann Goldberg moves on firmer ground with letters between two twentieth-century German-Jewish sisters whose global trajectories allow us to compare letters written under conditions of repression (the Stalinist USSR) with other moments and correspondences. The juxtaposition of Gerber's quest and Goldberg's detailed but limited portrait again underscores the complexity of letters as a historical resource. Goldberg's work also resonates with Helen Brown's biographical reading of letters within a British family separated by wartime evacuation to Canada. Again, as in Markelis, living testimonies enrich our reading of past documents.

As in *From Arrival to Incorporation*, Goldberg's piece also shows the role of the state as an intermediary, which figures in Richards's overview of immigration and Sinke's elegant condensation of the impact of postal technologies on marriage. The state also emerges in Karen Lemiski's reading of the envelope rather than the letter in her discussion of the postal institutions and stamps of the Ukrainian government-in-exile after World War II. It is refracted in Alexander Schunka's reading of early modern letters petitioning refuge in Saxony and Vadim Kukushkin's examination of letters to Canada's Russian consulate. While these seem to take the discussion in new directions, they reinforce central themes of a variegated and wonderful volume—the ambiguities and complexities of immigrant letters; their form, meaning, and preservation; the need to read them in a rich context of politics as well as social and cultural life; and the demand for specific hypotheses as well as comparisons with other data and cases. In the end, as in the other volume reviewed, the collection underscores the importance of wider conceptualizations, creative methods, and critical analysis in understanding immigration and connection not only in past times but also in the contested presents these pasts illuminate.

GARY W. MCDONOGH
Bryn Mawr College