

De esta manera, la obra se considera de gran utilidad para todo aquel que intente ir más allá del estudio gramatical de la lengua, dado que fue concebida como una serie de lecciones del náhuatl interactivo, apropiado a distintos contextos. Consecuente con esta naturaleza dialógica e idiomática del documento, la traducción inglesa ha sido convenientemente adaptada a los giros propios de esta lengua, aunque también nos ofrece una traducción más literal, lo cual, además de ser de suma utilidad para los estudiantes más o menos avanzados del náhuatl, resulta muy esclarecedor para seguir de cerca los recursos morfosintácticos que producen determinados giros idiomáticos en el náhuatl de la época.

Para concluir, vale la pena recalcar que esta nueva edición de los diálogos se beneficia de los avances más recientes en la comprensión de la estructura lingüística del náhuatl en sentido amplio. Esto desde luego respalda en una más cabal comprensión del propio documento, y por supuesto en la calidad de la propia traducción, razones de suyo más que suficientes para recomendar ampliamente la lectura de los Bancroft Dialogues en su presente edición.

JOSÉ ANTONIO FLORES FARFÁN

Earl Shorris, *Latinos, A Biography of the People*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1991.

Since the 1960's, when non-European immigrants began to surpass in number those coming from Europe, the country has undergone the most dramatic cultural and demographic shifts in its history. Not only has the United States become an immigrant nation once more, with close to 11 percent of the population foreign born, but, of greater importance, today nearly one in four Americans is of African, Asian, or Hispanic ancestry. And among these, Latinos, as many Hispanics prefer to be called, are by far the fastest growing. Demographers expect them to number at least 39 million by 2010, perhaps making Hispanics the biggest ethnic grouping within a generation. But who are these peoples? No book answers the question better than "Latinos".

Mr. Shorris, a novelist, nonfiction writer, and frequent contributor to newspapers and magazines, waited twenty years for a book like this to appear. Fortunately for us, he decided to wait no longer. By combining his journalistic and fiction writing skills to weave well-annotated sketches of Latino individuals, families, and predicaments into a single, compelling story he has shown how much journalism can

contribute to the creating of today's ethnographies of complex societies. Without his eye for the telling detail and the summarizing symbol, his capacity to mold wide-ranging data into concise narratives, and his keen interviewing skills, this credible profile of the cultural world of over twenty million people, intermixed among 226 million others, would have been impossible.

A sizable part of the book concerns the histories of the Latino communities, going back to their indigenous, Spanish, and African roots, but like most journalists, Mr. Shorris is best when dealing with the present. For instance, what he says about the Aztec language and culture, and their supposed influences on Mexican character, is usually wrong and best skipped ("macho" does not come from the Nahuatl "to know"). On the other hand, his discussion of the cultural role of multilinguality in the United States is well-informed and remarkably free of the partisan baggage the topic usually carries. Along with other knowledgeable observers (including anyone who rides the subways of New York), he argues that with or without bilingual education, and no matter what English-only policies are adopted, the nation is becoming linguistically bicultural. He goes even further. Using the comedian Paul Rodriguez as an example of the bilingual television host who can move easily from one cultural sphere to another, he advances a conclusion familiar to anyone with cosmopolitan experiences: an ability to use two languages makes one more social and less ignorant, helpless, and isolated.

The author sheds much needed light on many other related issues that are currently unheeding less knowledgeable observers. Among these are the persistence of ethnic identity, the failed inexorability of assimilation, and the assumed potential for the disuniting of America from multiculturalist initiatives. Concerning the first two, Mr. Shorris makes the necessary but usually neglected distinction between the motivations and experiences of turn-of-the-century European immigrants and those of Latinos. With no intention of returning, immigration for the former was an end to an old world. Their goal as "real" immigrants was a new social contract in which language, culture, names, and even lives would be sacrificed for liberty, equality, food, and the promise of wealth. But for Latinos, racism, proximity to homeland, and exile status have intervened making a similar social contract possible for only a few. When a true immigrant experience fails to materialize for the first generation, he claims, it may not occur at all and the second generation "is born dead" (135).

In agreement with much contemporary scholarship, Mr. Shorris

points to the crucial errors of midcentury sociology which established as truth the immigrant paradigm of inevitable assimilation in the course of three generations. He argues that the proponents of this model failed to understand Latinos and blacks, passing over the importance and tenacity of culture while greatly underestimating the significance of race. "From the vantage of an aerie at Columbia or Harvard the prognosis of one immigrant group looked a lot like that of another" (319). But reality was otherwise. For most blacks and Latinos poverty followed each generation. And for many among the latter, the closeness to the ancestral land, the continuous presence of a first generation, and the isolation engendered by racism all contributed to the maintenance across the generations of the Spanish language and Hispanic cultural traits.

Does this mean unassimilated Latinos are fragmenting America? Not according to Mr. Shorris, who is quick to note that neither poverty, discrimination, nor neglect have failed to discourage the overwhelming majority of Latinos from seeking their version of the American dream. And except for a few young activists in the 60's and 70's, Latinos have not advanced a separatist agenda. Instead, the book, which makes the process of assimilation its "core issue" (4), suggests that they are doing much at the economic, political, and social levels to help themselves gain a greater share of wealth, power, and visibility in multicultural America. After all, *e pluribus unum* is Latin, not Anglo-Saxon.

Mr. Shorris, raised in El Paso, Texas, and married to a Hispanic, is a sensitive observer of cultural differences who writes with affection of the Latino condition. But he is not an ethnic cheerleader and is too preoccupied with all sides of the story to be concerned with p.c. orthodoxies. The Hispanic and non-Hispanic origins of the predicaments of Latinos are each given their proper due. Thus his many references to the insidious nature of "racismo" among Latinos and racism as practiced against them leaves no doubts concerning the fact that the mixed-race nations of both sides of the Rio Grande handle the question of race with dirty hands. Yet Mr. Shorris does not suggest all these nations are at bottom qualitatively the same. As is the case in Linda Chavez's controversial "Out of the Barrio", the "dangerous and unromantic" (56) Puerto Ricans suffer here from comparison to better off Cubans or culturally rich Mexicans. For Anglos, he sadly concludes, "the island of Puerto Rico has no symbolic value at all"; while for all, its food has "the flavor of failure" (54).

The search for cultural unity in the face of historical, socio-economic, and racial diversity, a burden common to all comparative studies

of Hispanics, is undertaken by Mr. Shorris with great hesitation. Having studied them in depth from coast to coast and class to class, he refuses to romanticize the possible links and instead identifies Latinos as no more than "a complex of peoples" (62), sharing in different degrees vocabularies, values, and feelings towards Euro-Americans. His reluctance is also informed by an awareness that cultural distinctions and stereotypes can easily be confused. Considering the wide range of topics covered—history, religion, politics, education, business, the arts, music, literature, employment, and world view—Mr. Shorris does a laudable job at maintaining the boundary between the two. Nonetheless, many readers, especially Latinos, will be unforgiving when encountering phrases such as those quoted above or when meeting up with questionable depictions of, say, Mexican fatalism or Cuban fanaticism.

Still, this is a powerful, beautifully written, and thoughtful book that is likely to remain unequalled in its sweep and profundity for some time to come. Its is also a timely education for Americans of all nationalities, classes, and races. At a moment when much divisive propaganda is parading in the guise of concerned scholarship, it is good to know that on the basis of actual empirical research someone can credibly assert that "civilization need not be a zero sum game" (47). Mr. Shorris is wise to argue that "the victories of Latino culture are victories of pluralism... Nothing is taken in return for this enrichment; it is, by definition, a gift" (47).

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Poésie nahuatl d'amour et d'amitié (Poesía náhuatl de amor y amistad),
Introducción de Miguel León-Portilla. Selección y paleografía de Miguel León-Portilla y Georges Baudot. Traducción de Georges Baudot. Orphée, la Différence, Paris, 1991.

La poesía náhuatl prehispánica, inexorablemente pretérita, es difícilmente accesible para los lectores de hoy. En efecto, en tiempos prehispánicos el canto náhuatl se "derramaba" verdaderamente en un amplio espectro semiótico en el que el gesto y la danza, el ruido o la modulación sonora, la presencia jeroglífica y las pinturas, la fragancia de las flores o del incienso, forjaban en el crisol espacial de una instancia funcional de elocución, un conjunto hiperestésico que movilizaba todos los sentidos. Cuando los religiosos españoles emprendieron el rescate gráfico de estos cantos para salvarlos del olvido, no pudieron natural-