

Bender, Steven. *Tierra y Libertad: Land, Liberty, and Latino Housing*. Editor: Ediberto Román. New York and London: New York University Press, 2010. 252 pages. \$49.96 (hardcover). ISBN: 9780814791257.

In Trump's America, rhetoric characterizing Mexican Americans and other Latino/as as dirty, dangerous, and unworthy of the realization of the American dream circulates through the mainstream media and the Internet so prevalently, that such language becomes engrained in our minds, sometimes subconsciously. Embedded in Bender's *Tierra y Libertad: Land, Liberty, and Latino Housing*, is the effect of this language on Latinos/as in their quest for fair and equal housing opportunities, and although it was written during the Obama presidency, it bears upon the current juncture. As a law student diving into the legal, literary, and policy realms of property and border crossing, I cannot neglect to reflect my family's journey, and my own, as we have sought to pursue the American dream as Latino/as immigrants. Full of uncertainty, with a limited supply of money and an extraordinary abilities visa in my father's hands my family, accompanied by several extended family members, left samba and white sands behind to move into a tiny apartment along in a Texas suburb. Fortunately for us, our current family home replaced the tiny apartment, in part because of the support of English-speaking American family friends. Nevertheless, as Bender's work suggests, my experience grasping the American Dream differs dramatically from the experience of most Latino families.

¡Tierra y Libertad!—land and liberty—is not only the slogan of the 1900s Mexican Revolution, it is also an affirmation that land acquisition and home ownership are central to achieving the true freedom embodied in the American Dream. To that end, the book is not so much a historical account of the Latino housing struggle in American soil as it is a deep examination of how the actions of multiple private and public forces wove the Latino/a hope of home ownership in America into a tight knot of frustration and agony. Perhaps the most commendable aspect of the work is Bender's accurate grasp of the cultural, and "even spiritual" link between Latino/as and land (2). A central theme of Latino culture is the value it places on the family unit, and the family home takes center stage in embodying the lives and memories of Latino families, a recurrent theme in movies and novels that depict our communities. This cultural facet is deeply and continuously shattered throughout the book, as Bender describes in vivid detail the great lengths that public officials, neighbors, and lenders have gone through to masquerade unfair and discriminatory practices targeting Latino/as as legitimate policy.

The work is fittingly divided into four sections. Section I: "Loss" highlights the wretched history of land loss and housing exclusion experienced by Latino/as in this country and the recent techniques employed by governments, lenders, and private actors that serve only to exacerbate an already stark reality. Section II: "Exclusion" focuses on public and private efforts to exclude undocumented and documented Latino/a immigrants from local housing through the unfortunate twisting of legal principles such as trespass, nuisance, loitering, zoning, and restrictive covenants. Section III: "Geographic Examples of Loss and Exclusion" in turn, presents the accounts of Mexicans in East Los Angeles, Cubans in Miami, and Puerto Ricans in New York as "case studies" of the "legacy of segregation" that Latino/as have endured in this country (95). The author concludes the work with the Section IV: "Reclamation and Reform," which presents the reader with policy considerations and strategies, mostly legislative, to aid Latino/as in reclaiming space, lowering the cost of housing and credit, and overcoming income inequalities through immigration and education reform.

In order to contextualize and further support his proposals in Part IV of the book, Bender starts the work by framing the Latino struggle through the lens of familiar stories of loss, such as César Chávez's loss of his family home in Arizona during the Depression and the divestment of Spanish/ Mexican land grants from Mexicans to Anglos that continue into the twenty-first century (13-26). Further, in a beautifully written account of the appalling affordable housing crisis experienced by farm workers in affluent areas of California, Chapter 4: "Loss in the Tortilla Flats," sets the tone for the rest of the book. Laced with relevant statistics such as the finding that one-fifth of single bedroom residences in the area "had more than five people sleeping in them," and that the average combined family income for Latino/as in the area was only \$12,925 while apartments rented for \$825 to \$1,600 a month, the chapter hits the perfect balance of hard facts and narrative by contrasting the reality behind such statistics with American novels centered on Mexican-American dwellings (38-39). The Chapter explains how the overcrowded substandard housing in Monterey County feeds the narrative of Mexican Americans as dirty, fertile, and content with filthy living conditions (39). To support his point, Bender cites U.S. magazine reports and two novels that focus on Latino irresponsibility and lack of stewardship (39). It is the author's position that the myth created by feeding into these stereotypes justified Anglos in "taking a rich land away from people who were not making good use of it" (39). These links between the harsh realities of Latino life and the unwarranted stereotypes it feeds, as described in Chapter 4, are especially relevant today, as the media is inundated with similar discourse and imagery.

Part II, "Exclusion," is replete with accurate criminal and property law concepts that have been stretched and twisted throughout the years to push out Latino/as from the acquisition of land and even their mere presence therein. As an absurd illustration of one of such instances, Bender describes the attempts of New Hampshire police chiefs to stretch criminal trespass to prosecute undocumented immigrants for their mere presence in the town in the absence of valid immigration documents (64). The author then eloquently reflects on resulting instances of racial profiling as well as the New Hampshire judicial system's final determination, that applying criminal trespass principles in such manner constitutes an "unconstitutional local attempt to augment federal enforcement of immigration crimes" (65). "Exclusion" also carries the book's theme of spine-chilling contrasts between Latino and Anglo housing through language such as "while day laborers often pursue work in urban public spaces, by night they retreat to the shadows and margins of the American dream" (66). Similarly, while describing the ironic link between the outcry over immigration and Latino permanency in the U.S., the author makes the illuminating observation that "undocumented immigrants might be dreaming in Spanish, but they are dreaming the American dream of homeownership, a job, and a future for themselves and their children, all in the United States" (70).

Continuing the theme of Part II, Part III "Geographic Examples of Loss of Exclusion" provides a perfect transition into his proposal section (Part IV) with more vivid examples of the legacy of segregation endured by Latino/as in America. He does so first by offering the sneaky strategy adopted in southern California of using urban renewal as an excuse for displacing Mexicans from their traditional affordable community and replacing it with the Dodgers stadium, which had no public purpose (100-01). Similar stories shock the reader for the remainder of Part II with respect to Cubans in Little Havana and Puerto Ricans in East Harlem.

The concluding section of the book, "Reclamation and Reform," invites readers to dive into legal and policy proposals designed by the author himself. These are accomplished both at the micro-level, with illustrations of protests and symbolic camp-ins, and at the macro-level, with

the gigantic task of reforming the immigration and educational systems so that Latino/as can have a seat at the table. Although several suggestions are not realistically implementable in the Trump era on account of the radical conservative rhetoric and agenda we face as a nation, Bender's proposals draw from past initiatives that have produced change in other contexts (such as affirmative action strategies), which adds to the feasibility of his potential implementation mechanisms (144-45). Moreover, he builds his credibility in the "Policy Considerations" chapter by explicitly wrestling with political obstacles that proposed actions will most definitely face (151-54). I also admire and commend some of Bender's thoughtful and creative proposals such as supporting environmental imperatives that have the potential of helping shape tax policies benefitting Latino/a residents (163-64), adapting existing laws such as the Federal Truth in Lending Act to overcome language discrimination barriers (170-74), and building coalitions with African Americans, who have also faced hostility in the housing market to acquire and wield political power (184-87).

*Tierra y Libertad* is a spectacular eye-opening read for all students and scholars in the legal, literature, history, Latin American studies, and journalistic field. It is also a remarkable educational tool for all Latino/as who, like me, have achieved their American dream and desperately wish for a future where others will have a realistic opportunity to do the same. As the author suggests towards the end of the book, one the founding American values—the idea that hard work will present the rewards of financial prosperity and homeownership—is quickly eroding as Latino/as struggle to “grasp that brass ring” (187). This book, in turn, gives readers the opportunity to wrap their heads around the Latino housing struggle so that they are empowered to confront these issues in a manner that will benefit all Americans, ensuring that the idea of the American dream does not become a myth, replaced by an “ethos of discontent that hard work leads nowhere” (187).

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