

BOOK REVIEW: Enrique's Journey

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Enrique's Journey follows 17-year-old Enrique on his eighth migration attempt through Mexico and into the United States. Like many young immigrants, he is on a quest to be reunited with family; in this case, to find his mother who left for the U.S. when he was only five years old. Enrique's story is not unlike many young individuals who travel through many countries on trains and battle immigration officials, corrupt police, and violent groups that rob, beat, rape, murder and extort them along their travels to a new life in *el norte*, the north. The latest edition of *Enrique's Journey* includes an epilogue that summarizes the current situation of Enrique and his family, as well as an afterword that provides current statistics about migrants moving north.

Children as young as seven years old have been recorded making the journey through Central America from the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Enrique's journey begins in Honduras and illustrates the extremely common story of young children who risk their lives to find their parent(s) in the United States. Most often, parents leave in the hopes of being able to make money to provide for the family's basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and education for their children. Eighty-two percent of live-in nannies in Los Angeles and one in four house cleaners still have children in their home country, while 85 percent of all immigrant children in the U.S. spent at least some time separated from a parent (p. xv).

The journey of Enrique, while common, represents many who must travel by train top, *el tren de la muerte* (the train of death), where many lose limbs and their lives getting on and off the moving trains. Although Enrique traveled this way, there are other dangerous routes to the United States. There are *coyotes*, people who smuggle others into the U.S., who help secure “safe” travel throughout the journey; much depends on whether the smugglers are reliable and if the immigrant’s family can afford the heavy costs. This journey is extremely dangerous for women; one in six women caught by immigration report being sexually assaulted (p. 78). *Enrique’s Journey* shows the damage caused by migration, including the human rights issues that threaten migrant children along the way. As gangs and drug cartels have infiltrated many of these Central American countries, divorce rates have also risen; many mothers are left with little economic support and are persuaded to travel north for better opportunities.

Left behind are the children, who often feel abandonment and resentment towards their mothers and are more susceptible to joining gangs or becoming pregnant while still very young. Although this story is a powerful one, parts of this argument are problematic; while children may face challenges stemming from their lack of motherly love, it’s difficult to determine (especially from the outside perspective of a reader) whether an absent parent is worse than the alternative of not being able to provide food, shelter, and clothes for their children. Enrique left his girlfriend, Maria Isabel, who gave birth to his first child in Honduras. At a point in the book she contemplates making the journey to the U.S. herself so that their combined incomes could properly support their daughter. Maria Isabel's decision comes after talking with other women about experiences in the work force; in order for Honduran workers must compete with the speed, price, and production rates of other countries, so many factories stop hiring women after the age of 25. A young woman can only work so long with good pay, and without a husband it’s difficult to find financial security. At the same time, migrant workers in the United States face constant threats of deportation, discrimination, and sometimes unemployment

and poverty. This is a difficult situation which makes it hard to make universal claims about what is best for every person and every family.

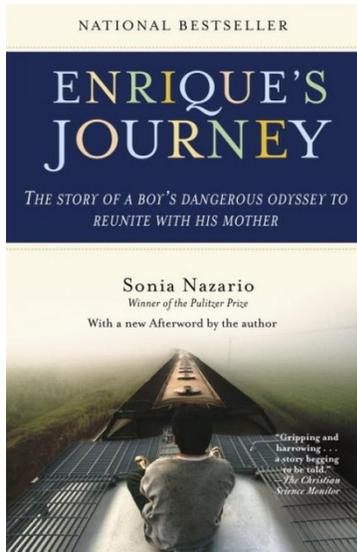
Enrique's Journey offered many stories of hope, such as the aid some Mexican towns offered to migrants and the guidance of churches, who reminded their congregations that Joseph and Mary were helped by strangers as they traveled to give birth to baby Jesus. These stories of human kindness endured even through some of the harshest struggles. Unfortunately these expressions of kindness are often the exception to the rule, but without them many would not have survived at all. These discussions offer a new perspective on migration to the United States that we rarely consider; the human connection and responsibility to one another. In the countryside of Veracruz, Mexico, for instance, many people who had very little to begin with would run to the train tracks and offer food, clothing, and water to help aid in the migrant journey. In Nuevo Laredo, near the U.S.-Mexico border, Padre Leo offers almost everything he has to help migrants. As he reminds his parish "that they too were once migrants. Saint Joseph was a migrant. The Bible was written by migrants" (p. 173). This theme of interconnectedness is a good reminder of humble beginnings and the importance of helping those in need; these themes relate to Christian teachings, which resonate with many Americans and migrants from Mexico and Central America.

An important element of this book is how corruption has infiltrated the police and immigration agencies. There is a strong fear of being deported among migrant groups, but even greater is the fear of physical harm, extortion, and murder. Many police look the other way on the abuses of migrants. Four out of five migrants who make it to Albergue Belen in Tapachula, over the border of Guatemala, have already been beaten, tortured, or extorted by police and highway checkpoint officers often charge smugglers \$50 to \$100 USD per migrant (p. 49). This reality is represented over and over throughout the book and provides strong evidence for the need for migration reform and tougher human rights protections. Unfortunately, the book often focuses more on migrants' responsibilities without properly

emphasizing the dramatic circumstances of helplessness they feel at the hand of corrupt governments and violent gangs. While the book touches on these injustices, in the end the overall tone suggests that the journey should not be desired or pursued by families. This perspective, although supported in the book, doesn't seem to fully consider the lived experiences of migrants.

This recent edition of *Enrique's Journey* provides readers with follow-up in the epilogue, which outlines the impacts of Enrique's successful migration into the United States, followed by his wife and child. Enrique battles substance abuse that began in Honduras, which he believes is a result of not having his mother there to take care of him as a child. The epilogue attempts to demonstrate the difficult transition that separated families encounter and how feelings of resentment over abandonment re-emerge. Enrique's story is more successful than most; even though he lost parts of his teeth and was severely beaten, he made it over the border and was able to bring his family shortly after. There is no doubt that this transition was difficult, but being in the United States allows migrants such as Enrique to send money home to help their poorer families, as well as build a future for their children (including a better education) in the U.S. The issue is not simple and no one answer works for everyone.

Overall, the dangers and repercussions of this dangerous journey are expressed beautifully throughout this book. It is important to note that Enrique's journey had a much happier ending than many people receive. Throughout his story, many other journeys were briefly told to express the struggles different individuals had to endure. In the presentation of this very complex topic, the reader can see inside the Enrique's world – including the issues of family relations, economic challenges, and emotional needs that drive this journey north. This perspective demonstrates the reality that many people face and helps expand dialogue on the issue of migration, as well as immigration policy debates taking place in the United States today.



Book Information

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