

BOOK REVIEW – *The Deportation Machine: America’s Long History of Expelling Immigrants*, by Adam Goodman

Tasha Roberts, Webster University – Saint Louis

In the *The Deportation Machine: America’s Long History of Expelling Immigrants*, Adam Goodman presents a compelling perspective on immigration to the United States that highlights the strife that migrants continue to face. The focus of Goodman’s book are those people affected by and through the “deportation machine” – the machinery of U.S. immigration law and practice. The discussion does not stem from a place of partisan politics, as conversations so often do in America today, although it would be wrong to say that politics have no presence in Goodman’s work. The role that politics play is not from a politician’s perspective, but rather this book strives to present the history of immigration through the lens of those who experience it, thereby keeping the topic of immigration history connected to lived experiences.

Goodman outlines how the deportation machine functions, focusing on three methods of deportation: Voluntary deportation, formal deportation, and self-deportation. Voluntary deportation is a method in which migrants are allowed (often under pressure from the U.S. government) to leave the country at their own expense. Formal deportation occurs when the government follows a legal course of forcibly and formally removing migrants from the country. This formal route is expensive and time-consuming for the government, and it also goes on the migrant’s permanent record (unlike voluntary deportation). Finally, self-deportation occurs when migrants are coerced by threats, violence, or fear campaigns to remove themselves from the country. The government, in this case, is not formally involved. Goodman also draws attention to the United States’ long history with anti-Mexican sentiments beginning in the mid-20th century, though we can see the effects of this attitude through time.

Goodman argues that there is a history of unjust treatment and representation of migration, and that this treatment cannot be simply assigned to one generation, political party, or politician. If

anything, this emphasis on placing blame contributes to inaction in aiding migrants. Goodman draws our attention towards what he calls the “deportation machine” – the laws, acts, agencies, and actions that have historically and currently led to the expulsion of millions of migrants from the United States. While some people may not want to see the deportation machine fixed and others don’t see it as a problem, the reality is that the deportation machine of America is deeply flawed; perhaps it is not unfixable (because broken is not the same as unfixable), but flawed from its conception. Goodman alerts readers to the historic mistreatment of migrants in a way that is critical, but in a thoughtful way that never attacks – a useful approach during polarized times, when discussion of controversial topics may cause some readers to simply shut down and disengage.

Goodman supports his thesis through personal stories, histories, government documents, and real-life experiences, as well as media records and scholarly literature. He takes readers step-by-step through the laws and actions that have defined and aided in the evolution of the deportation machine. Goodman explains, for instance, how events such as the World Wars led to a rise in xenophobia, how nativist movements and campaigns caused a rise in hate towards immigration, and how events such as 9/11 would deepen the American fear of foreigners. Goodman is skilled at offering compelling and deep research to support his claims, which keeps the readers engaged in this work. Indeed, he put a decade’s worth of work into writing this book; he shows deep care and passion for this topic.

Throughout *The Deportation Machine*, Goodman offers a broad discussion of immigration to the United States, with careful attention to the injustices that migrants face. The deportation machine must be reexamined – not by a specific political party, but rather in a fair and nonpartisan way. Steps must be taken to positively change this broken machine, which starts with realizing there is an issue within this system, listening to the problems from the perspective of those affected, and finally working as a country to emphasize shared humanity instead of engaging in cruel efficiency.

References

Goodman, Adam. 2020. *The Deportation Machine: America’s Long History of Expelling Immigrants*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

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