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From the Hill

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Q&A

PROFESSOR BEN FALLAW ON THE FORCES AT PLAY IN MEXICO AND WAYS THEY AFFECT U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY

GERRY BOYLE '78 INTERVIEW

Ben Fallaw, associate professor of Latin American studies, recently published a book, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, *that explores the ways the state was formed after the Mexican Revolution—including the emergence of the political party that would become the dominant PRI. After a dozen years out of power, the PRI is back and proposing changes that could reinvigorate the Mexican economy, with ramifications for the United States. Fallaw spoke to* Colby *Managing Editor Gerry Boyle '78 about changes taking place in Mexico.*

They're back. What did you think of the PRI's resurgence under President Enrique Peña Nieto?

First of all it was just surprise. I was there in 2000 when they lost. I followed the news closely and I've been back every summer since. I've been in Mexico just about every summer since 1994. So there was a feeling that the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] was done in 2000. And that it might well disintegrate entirely. What happened was not so much the PRI's astuteness or Machiavellian strategy; it was the inability of the right-of-center PAN [National Action Party] to rule effectively. The growth of violence with the cartels is the predominant issue. But it's an economy, like ours, that seems to produce more inequality along with growth, which is also a very serious concern.

So how did the PRI take advantage of that?

On the drug count, their genius was silence. They just said, "We're going to adopt another strategy that isn't based on sending the army in. Exactly what that is, we aren't sure." But there's been a decline in some parts of Mexico in terms of violence. So they can point to that and take credit. On the second count, the economy, they are moving to fix the education system, which is a real serious problem. And they're talking about taking on huge cartels—which some economists argue are more dangerous than the drug cartels—which is the cell phone companies owned by Carlos Slim, the wealthiest man in the world. Second is the domination of two large media companies. Peña Neito is also talking about other economic reforms, maybe privatization of oil, which would be a huge step.

Ben Fallaw, associate professor of Latin American studies

What are the chances of him being able to pull all of this off?

I think the most important thing for the PRI is to win. They don't want to leave power. And I think there is an understanding that they're going to turn on some of their friends in the business community in order to come up with a series of reforms that promote growth in a more sustainable way without booms and busts.

And there are busts?

There's still forty-four percent in poverty, ten percent in extreme poverty. Those are huge numbers in a country that in some ways is doing pretty well economically.

Can the PRI run solely on popular support?

They would say yes. Whether this is a superficial reform has yet to be seen, but I think they understand that competing with the Left means promoting a sort of a fair deal, something like Teddy Roosevelt tried to do here by taming some of the excesses of capitalism.

Is it mostly talk at this point?

The education reform has gone past talk. [Peña Nieto] is moving to take a census of every school in Mexico, find out who's the principal, how many teachers are there. Do they have teaching degrees? There's just a lack of knowledge on the part of the government of itself.

Peña Nieto had the head of the national teachers union arrested, right?

He arrested Esther Gordillo. She was corrupt on a scale that's hard to imagine, in terms of just piling up everything from Gucci bags to luxury apartments.

And a private jet.

A jet. Art work. It was a kind of excessive consumption that outraged a lot of Mexicans. And she opposed the president on education reforms, so cynics would say it was a way to score political points and implement these reforms.

AP PHOTO/ALEXANDRE MENEGHINI

Enrique Peña Nieto (center), president of Mexico and member of PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

The rampant poverty—aren't most Americans unaware of that?

Even if you've seen poverty in the Appalachians or inner cities in parts of the United States, the scale of poverty in rural Mexico and some urban areas—it's just staggering. You see hundreds of children in the streets instead of in school. Lack of running water. Diseases that are easily preventable. Illiteracy. And then there's the image Americans see on TV of beaches and pyramids.

The other image we see is dead bodies, the victims of drug cartels. It seems like a war zone. Some even warn Mexico could become a failed state.

It's not like that. Mexico has a huge middle class. It has a free press. Parts of the law enforcement system, particularly in Mexico City, have managed to get somewhat better. The cartels are dangerous, but they're not seeking to overthrow the government. This is not the Taliban.

You can get that impression from the news, though. Of total anarchy.

Part of it feeds into the immigration debate here, this notion that we have to seal our borders. I just saw a report that the drug cartels are planting people in the U.S. It's just not true. It's complete fabrication. I think it's mostly that bureaucrats are worried about budget cuts, and stories like this get attention. We're talking about it, so it got our attention, right?

These PRI economic reforms—how do they affect U.S. immigration policy?

The biggest effect on immigration policy is the decline of the American economy, so there's been a very large reduction in undocumented immigration. And I honestly don't see that reversing anytime soon.

Because the jobs aren't here in America?

The jobs aren't here. There's some recovery in the construction industry, but I've seen no indication that people are going to start crossing the border in large numbers.

And in the long term?

If Mexico were to fix its education system, were to have a higher level of growth, one that reaches that forty-four percent and the ten percent, the poorest of the poor—that, over the long run, would dry up the pool of immigrants. Frankly, the demographic momentum has shifted. Mexico went from ten million people in 1910 to maybe a hundred million people in 1990. Now Mexicans are starting to decrease family size, and that eventually is going to start to show in structural unemployment dropping. Especially if the education system turns around and people in very poor rural areas, which is traditionally where immigrants have come from, start to see more economic opportunities at home.

So these reforms would lessen that pressure to leave Mexico for work.

Absolutely. And frankly, as China moves up the production scale and wants higher-paying, more value-added jobs, that's a niche for Mexico, and its industry can start to recover. If its education system improves, with more English instruction, then Mexican companies are going to be better positioned to do business in the United States. I don't think we're ever going to see a large wave of immigration like we saw in the 1980s or '70s. I don't see the same factors being there. So I think any talk of so-called amnesty leading to another wave is just not realistic. The factors are just not there in Mexico.

The reasons to leave, you mean.

Right. The push factors. The pull factors here, also, are different.

And Mexico may have its own stronger economy.

Right. And I think the PRI will take credit for changes that are probably going to happen anyway in terms of demographics, China and its place in the world economy. These things are going to happen anyway, but the party in power is the one that will take credit for it, just as it would take the blame if things go bad.

So is it an optimistic time in Mexico then?

I think there is a guarded optimism about the new president. He was surrounded by groups from the old PRI in his campaign. In governing he seems to be distancing himself from them. If he actually is serious about reforming telecommunications, that suggests that he's serious.

To take on the richest man in the world.

To take on the richest man in the world and his lawyers.

Zhicheng "Jacob" Zhang '16 at work in the art studio. The Nanjing, China, resident chose Colby to pursue his interests in art and chemistry.

The Secret Is Out

MORE CHINESE STUDENTS CHOOSE COLBY—AND THE LIBERAL ARTS—OVER BIG AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

GERRY BOYLE '78 STORY **JEFF POULAND** PHOTOS

When Tianyang "Vera" Zhou '16 told friends at home in Beijing that she had decided to go to Colby College in the United States, their reaction told her she had some explaining to do. "They were, like, 'All right. You are going to a college that studies basketball?' All they know is *Kobe* [Bryant] from the Lakers. I'm like, 'No, not really. I don't play basketball.'"

"It takes a lot of work to explain to them exactly what a liberal arts college is."

But the word is spreading. And fast.

In China, where Harvard, Yale, and UCLA have long been the only household names of American education, Colby and other liberal arts colleges are making dramatic inroads as more and more Chinese students—and their parents—see the value of a liberal arts education.

The numbers, in fact, are skyrocketing. From a handful applying to Colby five years ago, there was a steady increase up until last year, when 149 students applied and 11 enrolled in the Class of 2016. This year 231 Chinese students applied, an increase of 55 percent in a general applicant pool that grew by 3 percent.

"It was an incredible bump," said Hung Bui '94, associate dean of admissions and financial aid.

It's a bump being felt by Colby's peers, but on Mayflower Hill the increased interest from Chinese applicants is nearly off the chart. Bui said an informal survey of selective liberal arts colleges, including several in NESCAC, showed that applications from China were up an average of 27 percent. At Colby, the number was up nearly 50 percent, Bui said.

Why? Chinese students at Colby point to Colby's personal touch in recruiting trips to Chinese high schools (Bui has been to China twice in two years with a 12-college group; Steve Thomas, director of admissions and financial aid, makes regular recruiting trips to Asia). They also

say there's a growing awareness of the liberal arts as an alternative to big universities—spreading in large part on social media and websites. Chinese students at small liberal arts colleges in America are taking to the Internet to fill in high schoolers back home.

"At least my generation, when we're applying we see this kind of stuff," said Ronghan "Michelle" Wang '16, a Presidential Scholar from Shenyang.

The "stuff" includes reports from Chinese students who chose what is still seen by many in China as an unconventional path for their education—and are glad they did. Close relationships with professors, small classes, and opportunities to branch out academically and in extracurricular activities are being touted as alternatives to typical experiences at big-name universities.

"Different people have different needs," said Zhicheng "Jacob" Zhang '16. Zhang said he would definitely recommend Colby to Chinese students who "have a hard decision like mine." For Zhang, from Nanjing, the decision was whether to pursue his interest in chemistry or art history. At a university he would have to pick one, but at Colby he is able to study both, he said, and he is considering a double major.

> "Because I'm here, the most important thing I've learned is that I can think for myself. I learned how to challenge myself."
> **–Meng "Maggie" Zhao '16**

Other Chinese first-years are doing the same. Wang wants to major in psychology and French. Xueqing "Quincy" Qiao '16, from Beijing, wants to major in mathematics with a music minor (she sings in the Colby Chorale and an a cappella group). Zhou came to Colby because of its strong Environmental Studies Program, but she wants to add a second major in women's, gender, and sexuality studies. She will be an orientation leader for incoming first-years next semester.

Meng "Maggie" Zhao '16, from Tianjin, is studying psychology but is also interested in theater and this semester was stage manager for a production of *Henry IV*. "Because I'm here, the most important thing I've learned is that I can think for myself," Zhao said. "I learned how to challenge myself."

All of these students are extremely well-prepared academically (Wang and Qiao are Presidential Scholars), according to Bui. But they chose the American liberal arts route over the Chinese university system, which they say is more rigid.

Qiao, the math major, said she had spoken to a friend studying math at prestigious Peking University. "He has five math classes a semester," she said. "And I'm a math major and I have one or two." She told her friend how much she enjoyed a philosophy course first semester and he said, "Philosophy? Why are you studying philosophy?" Qiao said. "I don't want to do math my whole life. I really want to try different things."

But there were considerable obstacles to taking the liberal arts path, the students said.

Xueqing "Quincy" Qiao '16 during a rehearsal of the Colby Chorale. The math major and music minor explores a variety of academic interests.

The word "college" roughly translates to a word that means community college in China, so some think a college in America is the equivalent, they said. Also, high schools in China are measured by how many students they place in prestigious Chinese universities. "If they lose their best students to the U.S., they're not getting the prestige for the school or the principal," Bui said.

The biggest challenge for recruiters still is the lack of name recognition most American liberal arts colleges have in job-conscious China. Big-name American universities provide a better entrée to a job in China if Chinese students return home with only an undergraduate degree, they said. But in recent years, the Colby students said, students and parents have begun to realize that an undergraduate degree from a college like Colby can lead to a prestigious American graduate school, which translates easily back home.

For Chinese students, as for their American counterparts, the transition to a small liberal arts college isn't always smooth. Zhang said he felt his English skills held him back at first. And some said they missed the Asian food and shopping malls they enjoyed back home. The long Maine winters, they said, are warmer than winters in parts of China.

Zhou said Chinese high school students admitted to begin next year had begun asking what they should bring to Colby. "Clothes," she tells them, "but don't bring the warm ones. Just get them in Maine. We have L.L. Bean."

“Let’s Get Dinner Sometime”

STUDENTS PRACTICE THE LOST ART OF DATING

KAYLA LEWKOWICZ ’14 STORY **JEFF POULAND** PHOTOS

Courtney Laird ’13 and Carly Rushford ’13 had had enough with dating at Colby. But it wasn’t because, as seniors, they had eliminated all the eligible bachelors. They were disappointed because the dating scene, they said, seemed stuck in binary—with people either single in the party hookup scene or involved in serious relationships.

“The idea of going on a date has become so romantically connoted, and so scary because of that, that just the idea of taking someone out to dinner or coffee in the Spa has become so much more than actually just sitting down and getting to know someone,” said Laird.

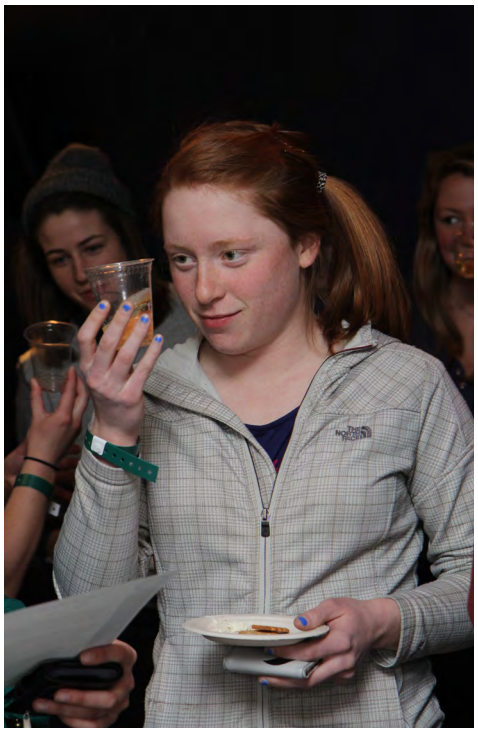
Both Laird and Rushford wanted to get to know other seniors and to get some practice for the post-Colby dating scene. Last fall they spread the word, and the result—thanks to organizers Jonathan Kalin ’14, who has been active in the campus group Male Athletes Against Violence, Keith Love ’13, and Omari Matthew ’14—was “Take Back the Date,” a weeklong program intended to show students how to ask someone on a date without romantic pressure.

The week in April was packed with events aimed at both the casual dater and those in serious relationships. With restaurant deals in town, a relationship advice panel, a wine tasting, a ballroom-dancing class, and a jazz dance with live music, students had plenty to choose from.

Most popular were the steep restaurant discounts off campus, which provided an incentive for students to date in a more intimate or private manner—or just to eat out with friends.

Colby students—from small-table pairings to groups of friends—packed Riverside Café in Oakland Friday and Saturday night. Rushford dined with a group of six, spending more than two hours sitting, eating, and chatting. “At the end of the night we got twenty-five percent off our bill,” she said. “It was great.”

At the relationship panel student “experts” in the art of dating fielded questions and facilitated discussion with hilarious results. Panelists were a diverse group with different kinds of experience, from long-term long-distance relationships to shorter commitments.



Emma Donohoe ’14 took part in a wine tasting during “Take Back the Date,” a weeklong program aimed at encouraging dating at Colby.

The panelists kept the crowd entertained with funny anecdotes, but also doled out more serious advice for questions like “How do you prepare for a date?” and “What was the most romantic gesture you ever made?”

Archie Adams ’13, one of the panelists, said his most romantic effort was building a candle-lit igloo for his girlfriend of three years. Patrick Adams ’13 described a sunset picnic on the beach with his boyfriend.

“It felt much more like a discussion, rather than the end-all-be-all of romantic advice,” Archie Adams said after the panel.

“I really liked the setup because it felt more casual,” said Leah Walpuck ’13, another panelist. “I think that made all kinds of people comfortable asking questions.”

Even those with two left feet had a shot at impressing someone new. Though their sessions are always open to the Colby community, members of the Ballroom Dance Club saw new faces at their session Wednesday night. “Ballroom dancing was sort of a throwback to dating and also just a really fun event,” Love said.

With so much success, Kalin, Love, and Matthew plan on repeating “Date Week” every year or every semester. They have more ideas, like speed dating, a fashion show, or coordinating the week with Valentine’s Day. Said Love, “It’s a fun, normalized way to have noncommittal dates.”

And the actual dating advice? Everyone involved advocated taking a leap of faith: “My biggest piece of advice would be to risk it,”

> “The idea of going on a date has become so romantically connoted, and so scary because of that, that just the idea of taking someone out to dinner or coffee in the Spa has become so much more than actually just sitting down and getting to know someone.”
>
> –Courtney Laird ’13

Wayne Kim '14 and Amanda Lavigueur '13 at Riverside Farm Market in Oakland. Left, a group at Amici's Cucina in Waterville: right to left, Jeff Meltzer '15, Alyssa Acebedo '15, Meredith Zakon '15, Leah Powley '15, Jill Riendeau '15, Grace DeNoon '15, and Darcy Ahern '15.

said Laird. "If you don't take that risk, then what are you going to get out of it?"

"Be bold and have fun," said Love.

"Just go for it," Matthew said. "The worst thing that can happen is that they say no."

Said Rushford, who, like Laird, spent her dinner-date night with a group at Riverside Farm Market and Café, "If there's someone you want to get to know, you think is cool, you think is awesome, ask them out on a date. It doesn't have to be a romantic thing, but it can just be a, 'Hey, I think you're a cool person, I want to know more about you. Let's get dinner sometime.'"

Into the Forests of Gondar

COLBY RESEARCHERS PLUMB THE SECRETS OF ETHIOPIA'S ANCIENT "CHURCH FORESTS"

STEPHEN COLLINS '74 STORY **LYDIA BALL '13** PHOTOS

In a faraway land, in a province named South Gondar, the arid landscape is dotted with ancient Orthodox Christian Tewahedo churches. Forests encircle these churches—hundreds of green spots visible in satellite photos—and they are about the only stands of trees surviving after the Amhara people expanded their agricultural fields by cutting down more than 95 percent of the old forest for fuel, crops, and grazing.

A scenario out of J.R.R. Tolkien? An imaginary land in the game Myst?

No. It's the situation Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies Travis Reynolds encountered in northern Ethiopia two years ago. Now these so-called "church forests" are living laboratories for Colby undergraduates conducting original research likely to yield new species and destined to help preserve these unique island ecosystems.

Lydia Ball '13, who grew up in Philadelphia eager to become a globe-trotting herpetologist and photographer, was one of the first two Colby students to visit the church forests in summer 2012. Both made the trip with support from Hollis Foundation Student Research Fund and Environmental Studies Program research funds.

Her goal was a biodiversity inventory—survey data on frogs and insects in two of the forests, which are known to contain endangered plants and have already produced new species of insects. As an environmental studies major with a concentration in science, Ball worked with Ellen Evangelides '14, an environmental policy major who was conducting interviews. "That's what we're trying to merge together. It's taking our scientific knowledge to make policy recommendations and to formally preserve these church forests," she said.

But not so fast. Among the reasons these refuges still exist at all are church policies that have kept outsiders out for more than a thousand years. So, on the first Colby research trip, Ball, Evangelides, and Reynolds "weren't allowed to step one foot inside," Ball said. They respected the prohibition in the interest of building a relationship, and she collected her specimens around the edges of the forests.

Trust established, when Reynolds took three Colby students back last January, they had necessary church and government permits and were welcomed in.

"When we finally entered the church forest, it was an amazing and powerful experience," Ball said of her second trip. "The churches themselves are fantastically old with these really amazing paintings. ... It was very much an otherworldly experience." She described priests and students living in ancient dwellings in the forests, and all of the people "so kind and open and sharing what was happening in their community."

"Magical," Reynolds called it. He described the surrounding African landscape: the soil cracked, arid, and abused; the temperature blazing hot. "Then you walk into the church forest and it's ten degrees cooler, and there are birds and insects, and there's an ashkoko [a rodent-sized mammal more closely related to elephants than squirrels] climbing up the tree, and it's like, 'This is what was here two hundred years ago.'

"And this is all that's left."

Above: Worshippers approach the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church of St. George on St. George's holiday. Hewn from solid rock in the 13th century, it is one of a 11 churches in Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Left: huge trees have survived in the protected church forests.

As a Ph.D. candidate, Reynolds had attended a conference in Ethiopia on managing natural resources for community benefit. When he arrived at Colby, one of his teaching assignments was the international environmental policy capstone course.

He recalls getting in touch with contacts in NGOs and at the university he had visited and telling them, "I've got this team of advanced undergraduate students with all the training and resources you could want in terms of data analysis, in terms of writing skills, in terms of communications skills, in terms of web expertise.

"How can I put that to use for you for free?" he asked. And "Is there anything of value that Colby students can produce that would be useful to you in this realm of environmental policy, environmental planning?"

It turned out that there was, he said.

His 2011 capstone students completed six studies that had them talking on the phone or by Skype to stakeholders with specific concerns about the environment in Ethiopia. "And what they do matters," said Reynolds of his students.

The exchange evolved into a schedule where Reynolds is doing field research in Ethiopia while he is setting up the capstone research semi-

"If we're in a situation where people revere these trees because they're sacred, it might not be a good idea to pay people to plant trees for carbon, because now it's no longer a sacred forest, it's a carbon cash generator. And there's a very different ethos associated with that."

– Travis Reynolds, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies

nar on a year-to-year basis. And now, "students come to Ethiopia with me, both as research assistants and as presenters sharing the result of their capstone."

Last January seniors Ball, Kate Hamre, and Sally Holmes took part in a conference—a meeting of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo priests called "The Sacred Forests Workshop"—sponsored by Colby's Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement at Bahir Dar University. Organizers included the leading expert, Alemayehu Wassie Eshete, who was raised in one of the churches and studied for the priesthood, later earned his Ph.D., and literally wrote the book, in 2008, about Ethiopian church forests. It was Alemayehu, with contacts in the church, in academe, and in the government, who provided entree for Colby researchers to enter the sacred forests.

Alemayehu recently wrote that he expected 100 priests and church officials for the workshop, but more than 150 showed up. "It was so amazing!"

Also presenting at the Goldfarb Center conference was Margaret Lowman, who has collaborated with Reynolds. The director of the North Carolina Nature Research Center, she is a pioneer in the study of forest canopies and a leader in studying the church forests.

Doing research in the Horn of Africa appealed to Ball for several reasons. Globetrotting was one. (As a junior she studied in New Zealand for a semester and did frog research with Associate Professor of Biology Cathy Bevier in Brazil in January.) Another was the chance to fill a void. "One of the reasons policy recommendations are so difficult in Ethiopia," she said, "is that there's no data."

Few if any records on the forests or their biodiversity exist. It wasn't even clear how many church forests there are. Tewahedo canonical writings say 35,000, but research by Jacob Wall '16—who scoured satellite photos in Colby's GIS lab as Reynolds's research assistant this year—counted 1,354 church forests at least 100 meters in diameter in northern Ethiopia, 859 of them in South Gondar. Wall found 615 additional churches with no remaining forests and few if any trees, Reynolds said.

"In particular, Ethiopia is data deficient on amphibians," Ball said. "There's one book by this mysterious man from the London Museum, and nobody knows what's out there. So if I had the opportunity to contribute, that meant something."

Reynolds emphasizes the importance of both the scientific data and the social science. On the policy side, he said, students have been "looking at the institutional governance structures that have kept church forests standing when the rest of the forests are gone."

"If we're in a system where people are more likely to steal a tree from the government than they are to steal a tree from a church," he said, then perhaps nationalizing forests is a bad idea. "Similarly, if we're in a situation where people revere these trees because they're sacred, it might not be a good idea to pay people to plant trees for carbon, because now it's no longer a sacred forest, it's a carbon cash generator. And there's a very different ethos associated with that."

The globetrotting research experience changed Ball's thinking. "As a scientist, I get caught up in the conservation and I get caught up in how cool bugs are, how cool amphibians are. I don't necessarily always bring people into the picture, but it's necessary to when you're talking about conservation in areas where there are lots of pressures.

"Working with Travis, with the natural resource economist—working with the policy—really broadened my view. All of my other experiences led into this—viewing myself as a global citizen rather than just a U.S. citizen, and that your duty is to humanity and not just to the frogs that you love."

As she prepared to head off to do amphibian research in Wyoming after graduation, she said, "It is funny. I thought I would have more of an idea what I wanted to do when I graduated, but I have less of an idea."

"I guess it's not that I have less of an idea," she said with a laugh. "It's that my interests are broader and I see more things as accessible."

Left: An Ethiopian boy works in the field with a church forest in the background. Middle: Paintings in an Orthodox Tawahedo Church that students visited. Right: A local boy helping students with a tree-planting project holds a toad, to the delight of photographer/herpetologist Lydia Ball '13.

Paradox or Paragon?

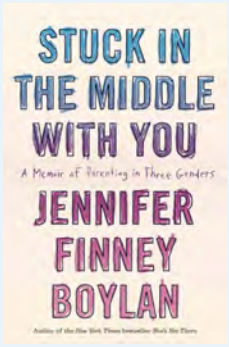
BOYLAN MEMOIR ABOUT PARENTING IS A NEW AND POWERFUL LOVE STORY

MIRA PTACIN REVIEW

In the first pages of *Stuck in the Middle With You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders*, Jennifer Finney Boylan, transgender mother of two, sits in the bleachers at her son's fencing match, making chit-chat with a stranger named Grenadine, who is unaware of Boylan's past. After revealing that her husband is serving in Iraq and she more or less hopes he dies there, Grenadine eyes the wedding ring on Boylan's finger. "What about you?" she asks. "Where's yours?"

Considering whether to share her history—that she used to be a man, became a woman 10 years ago, and her marriage to a woman has lasted 25 years—Boylan reveals a paradox: "People looking at my wife, Deedie, and me—two women, not lesbians, legally married to each other—would say we were insane ... a threat to traditional American values ... whereas Grenadine and [her husband] were a paragon of all we revere: a heterosexual married couple, a dad serving his country in a war overseas. By almost anyone's measure, Deedie and I are the dangerous outliers, and Grenadine and her husband Mr. and Mrs. Normal. Even though Deedie and I love each other beyond all understanding, and Grenadine's fondest hope was that her husband would be murdered by insurgents."

This episode would be painful and pathetic if



Stuck in the Middle With You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders
Jennifer Finney Boylan (English)
Random House (2013)

Boylan weren't so hilarious and irreverent. ("More couples would stay together if more husbands became women.") In a culture riddled with homophobia, not to mention transphobia, a manipulative writer might have mined these themes for more political commentary: there is no such thing as a "normal" American family; the threatened species may be the typical nuclear American family itself. And while Boylan briefly touches on this sentiment, she is less concerned about her outward appearance than she is about parenting her children.

As Boylan transformed from man to woman, she feared that her gender realignment surgery and new lifestyle might damage her two children, Zach and Sean. Now Boylan was a father for six years and a mother for 10. (And for a time in between, she writes, "a parental version of the schnoodle, or the cockapoo.") It might be expected that this dramatic transformation would cause disruption in her family, a breakup, or thrust Boylan into a vortex of self-absorption. But as her memoir reveals, there was no divorce, and her kids seamlessly accepted her transition as no big whoop. (Her boys had one request: "Use our real names for a change.")

It's clear that the quest for feeling "normal" isn't the focus of this memoir. The most important thing to Boylan is her family, so much so that she goes beyond her own experience and understanding by interviewing friends and colleagues to see what family means to them. These interviews, coupled with the daily rhythms of her family in Belgrade Lakes, Maine, show that while appearances might make a family look "normal," appearances aren't what makes a family work. And despite Boylan's resistance to love as an antidote to conflict, ("The world is full of false hopes, most of them dumber than the hope of being transformed by love") what Boylan doesn't view beneath the surface of her own narrative is that she has actually written, and been elevated by, a love story.

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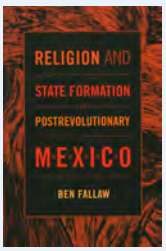
RECENT RELEASES

Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico
Ben Fallaw (Latin American studies)
Duke University Press (2013)

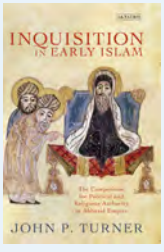
The Mexican Revolution was intended to set off a wave of agrarian and education reform. But, as Ben Fallaw's new book shows, the Roman Catholic Church remained a force at local and state levels and had a profound effect on the extent of state reformation. Fallaw examines the history of Catholicism in four under-studied Mexican states and shows that religious influence frustrated the secular vision of anti-Catholic leader Plutarco Elias Calles and President Lázaro Cárdenas. Fallaw's prodigious research and careful analysis have resulted in a rethinking of the process of state formation in Mexico and produced what one critic calls "a key text in Mexican revolutionary history."



Editor's note: Q&A with Fallaw on ongoing political change in Mexico, P. 40.

Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire
John P. Turner (history)
I.B. Tauris (2013)

Most people know about the Inquisition, which began when Roman Catholic authorities decided to root out heresy in 12th-century France, setting off a process that spread throughout Europe and continued for some 700 years.



But the Roman Catholic version came nearly 400 years after the ruling Islamic caliph, Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun, launched a similar effort in Baghdad, interrogating religious scholars to make sure they adhered to and taught the "correct" Islamic beliefs.

As in the Inquisition that would follow centuries later, those who didn't toe the theological line suffered greatly. And though the Islamic inquisition, known as the mihna, lasted just 15 years, it was a pivotal moment in the struggle between secular and religious authorities. The period was marked by a new definition of heresy, which emerged from a series of trials, vividly recreated by Turner in this new study.

Says scholar Sir James Montgomery, Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge, "The mihna was, as Turner persuasively argues, one of the many complex steps backwards and forwards which culminated in the articulation of sunni Islam."

Food for Thought

DOCUMENTARY EXPLORES LIVES OF IMMIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

ROCIO ORANTES CAREY '07 REVIEW

Whether you have been following the immigration debate with bated breath or have no idea who Marco Rubio is, chances are your day-to-day life will be affected by whatever becomes America's immigration policy.

Most food produced in the United States is planted, weeded, picked, and packed by hand by the estimated 3 million immigrant farm workers, an estimated 50 percent of whom entered the country illegally.

Immigrant farm workers are invisible to most Americans—but not to filmmaker Nancy Gottlund Ghertner '71.

Ghertner met seasonal and migrant farm workers in her hometown of Sodus in New York and embarked on a project to try to understand their lives and the forces at work in them. The result is the feature-length documentary, *After I Pick the Fruit*, directed, produced, and edited by Ghertner, that tells the story of five female migrant workers over a 10-year period.

Ghertner frames her film with a question: "Will they [the women] find a place here in my town after they pick the fruit?" The town she refers to is both physical (Sodus) and metaphorical (the "town square" we call America). There are no easy answers.

Maria and Vierge are immigrants who entered the country legally and travel to New York from Florida for the apple season. Vierge was born in Haiti and was admitted to this country as a political refugee. Maria's husband came to the States from Mexico illegally, applied for papers during an amnesty in the 1980s, and sent for her shortly afterward. Despite poverty, homelessness, hard labor, child-care issues, and income insecurity, fortitude and pride emerge from Maria and Vierge's stories. They were not born in the United States, but there is no doubt that they are now part of this country's story: immigrant women pursuing their own version of the American dream.

Farm workers in a scene from Ghertner's film.

Three of the women—Soledad, Lorena, and Elisa— entered the country from Mexico without legal permission. At first we relate to them in the same way we relate to Maria and Vierge—they're hard-working immigrants seeking a better life. And then Bush-era immigration crackdowns begin. Two of the women's husbands are deported. Immigration vehicles patrol the local Catholic parish shattering the immigrant community that gathered there. Though they can still find work, the women and their families live in constant fear. One family packs up and returns to Mexico.

The women in the film don't provide tidy answers to Ghertner's question. The women with documents are creating a place for themselves in welcoming communities in Florida. The women without documents are staying in New York, supported by some but in a country that disapproves of them.

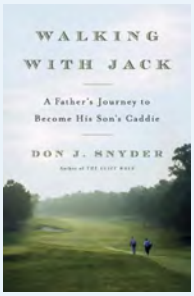
Politicians in Washington may be talking about immigration as matters of policy, but, in the end, the power in *After I Pick the Fruit* comes from these personal stories, the questions they raise, and the assumptions they challenge.

Rocio Carey '07 works for the Maine Migrant Health Program.

After I Pick the Fruit
Nancy Gottlund Ghertner '71
Documentary film (2013)

On the golf course, father and son come to grips with life and each other

No one can accuse Don J. Snyder '72 of living an unexamined life. Novelist, nonfiction writer, and memoirist, the author of *The Cliff Walk* has spent his career reflecting deeply on relationships, real and fictional.



In his latest memoir, *Walking with Jack: A Father's Journey to Become his Son's Caddie*, Snyder turns his unflinching gaze to the story of his pursuit of a dream—to caddie for his son Jack, a college golfer with PGA aspirations, on the professional tour.

That Snyder had never caddied—had never even used a caddie—did not deter him. A few months after a farewell father-son golf trip to Scotland, Jack begins his collegiate golf career at the University of Toledo; Snyder heads in the other direction, the venerable courses of Scotland to begin his life as a caddy.

It's 2008. He's a 57-year-old American with a bum knee. One golf course rejects him after learning he's a writer. Another course allows him in, and the professional caddies, a platoon of weather-beaten, philosophizing veterans, see him as a curiosity but take him on. He may be Don J. Snyder the writer back home, but to them he's "Donnie" who could use a pointer or two.

Snyder and his compatriots are like hunting guides, ushering golfers from around the world along the challenging Scottish links, imparting advice like diplomats. Snyder knows his golf and golf history, and the anecdotes are sprinkled like birdies throughout.

But this is more a book about a father and son and their fitful relationship than it is a book about golf.

Jack Snyder is kicked off the team for bad grades, loses his bid for a full-ride scholarship, and two dreamers—father and son—are rudely awakened.

But Snyder won't give up on his son and returns to Scotland for a second caddying season. Jack eventually graduates from the university and decides to give the pro tour a shot. Father and son are reunited as golfer and caddy for a satellite tour in Texas.

It would spoil the suspense—and Snyder's hole-by-hole account of the tournament rounds is close to gripping—to reveal Jack Snyder's fate on the tour. And in the end, this is a book about trying to hold onto something—children, defining moments, innocence—that slips through our fingers no matter what.

"Part of falling in love with all of you when you were babies," Snyder writes of his four children, "was believing that I would have you forever. And there was a moment when it became clear to me that I wouldn't."

But he won't let go without a fight, or at least without doing everything possible to create those special times and commit them to memory. Even non-golfers will find it worthwhile to follow him around the course.

—Gerry Boyle '78

Walking with Jack: A Father's Journey to Become His Son's Caddie
Don J. Snyder '72
Doubleday (2013)