



The Book of Unknown Americans

Cristina Henríquez

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A dazzling, heartbreaking page-turner destined for breakout status: a novel that gives voice to millions of Americans as it tells the story of the love between a Panamanian boy and a Mexican girl: teenagers living in an apartment block of immigrant families like their own.

After their daughter Maribel suffers a near-fatal accident, the Riveras leave México and come to America. But upon settling at Redwood Apartments, a two-story cinderblock complex just off a highway in Delaware, they discover that Maribel's recovery--the piece of the American Dream on which they've pinned all their hopes--will not be easy. Every task seems to confront them with language, racial, and cultural obstacles.

At Redwood also lives Mayor Toro, a high school sophomore whose family arrived from Panamá fifteen years ago. Mayor sees in Maribel something others do not: that beyond her lovely face, and beneath the damage she's sustained, is a gentle, funny, and wise spirit. But as the two grow closer, violence casts a shadow over all their futures in America.

Peopled with deeply sympathetic characters, this poignant yet unsentimental tale of young love tells a riveting story of unflinching honesty and humanity that offers a resonant new definition of what it means to be an American. An instant classic is born.

The Book of Unknown Americans Details

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Author : Cristina Henriquez

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From Reader Review The Book of Unknown Americans for online ebook

Julie says

The Book of Unknown Americans by Christina Henriquez is a 2014 Knopf publication.

I've been looking to expand my reading repertoire lately, so while browsing through the literary offerings, I came across this book. Checking this book out is like doing a 180 for me as I usually stick pretty close to my preferred genres.

But, something about it spoke to me and so I decided to give it a try.

So often we hear about laws, and issues, and the numbers surrounding immigration without stopping to consider the human element.

This book puts names with faces, and finally humanizes the population of people who come to this country for various reasons, hoping for a better way of life.

When Maribel Riveras suffers a traumatic brain injury, her family moves to America to enroll her in a special school in hopes she will eventually regain all she lost in the accident.

Fifteen year old Mayor Toro has lived in America his entire life, but his family is from Panama. He and Maribel strikes up a friendship which eventually turns into a sweet and tender love story while their parents struggle with the decision they made to make America their home.

While the topic of immigration is one that is sure to spark instant and heated debate, especially during an election year, this book is not a political novel, it is just a story that paints a vivid portrait of the way of life many immigrants face after moving to America.

There are inspired moments amid the bittersweet and poignant realities, and will really make you stop and consider things from an entirely different perspective.

I admired the families that were represented in this story, and recognized in them the same qualities as most Americans possess. They worked hard to provide for their families, they had hopes and dreams, went through good times and bad, but mostly they wanted to give their children a better way of life, something which I think we all strive for.

The love story between Maribel and Mayor is especially touching and despite the animosity and stubbornness, his father exhibited, Mayor followed his heart, and his attention to Maribel was what brought about the biggest improvements for her.

Although the story was not necessarily one that left me feeling upbeat or all that hopeful in the end, it did enlighten me, and is very thought provoking.

I can see why this story as garnered such critical acclaim and I have to say I am pleased I took a chance on it.

Overall- 4 stars

David says

This book could have been so much better than it was.

As it is, it's a trainwreck. The only reason I gave it two stars instead of one is simply because it's bizarrely readable even in spite of the very little substance there is at hand.

Where do I even begin with this book's issues? The rhythm the book sets into -- Alma-narrated chapter, Mayor-narrated chapter, and brief bio of a tertiary character -- had potential. Yet the tertiary characters' chapters all read painfully alike, with seemingly the only thing changed the character's respective nationality. Mysteriously, Henriquez ignores all differences between each country; there's nothing particular Nicaraguan about Benny or Venezuelan about Quisqueya. This device was probably aiming to establish some sense of a pan-Latino identity, but you don't do that by ignoring difference -- you do that by embracing it.

Alma had potential as a character, but as a central character to the book, she is perhaps childishly optimistic and at first completely oblivious to the country she is living in. As a child of Latino immigrants and a friend to many Latino immigrants, this couldn't ring more false. Some of the cultural differences she is unaware of are frighteningly simple! Where does she shop for groceries? How does she spend money? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure there are supermarkets with fixed prices in Mexico.

Similarly, Mayor is likeable -- but to use first person perspective with him simply did not work. Mayor's narration is actually very similar to what I'd expect someone his age and with his cultural background to sound like. The problem is that just isn't very interesting to read. The weird romantic twist his chapters took was creepy, not in the least because he seemed to be praying on a girl with a traumatic brain injury.

Worst of all, though, was the bizarre and sudden melodramatic turn in the novel's final third. A more experienced writer could have handled this with grace, but here it simply comes across as needlessly preachy and unnecessarily condescending.

Is Henriquez talented? Yes. She has plenty of potential, but choosing such an ambitious project as her first novel -- a book that seemingly tries to express the voice of not just one Latin American nationality, but all Latinos -- is out of her grasp, and would likely be out of the grasp of even the most experienced Latino writers. Instead of a revelatory and fascinating look at Latinos in the U.S. today, we get a cloyingly sentimental and bland sketch of many characters, none of whom seem very believable.

Dianne says

Alma and Arturo come from Mexico to Delaware, of all places, in the hopes that their brain-damaged daughter, Maribel, can get better help at a special needs school in the U.S. Their story is interspersed with testimonials from men and women from Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Panama and other places. All of the stories and vignettes combine into a whole that tells the tale of one immigrant community in America and the struggles they face trying to assimilate.

While enlightening and interesting, I wish the characters would have been more fully fleshed out - I didn't find it as affecting as it could have been. Still, a timely topic and a story that will keep you turning the pages.

Adira says

I read this book with the Writers of Color Book Club and I have to say, I am on the fence about this one. On one hand, the book was interesting due to it's cast of characters who all had a voice and the issues of immigration and how Latinos are seen in America were really intriguing to me since I very rarely see books written from this demographic of people in my TBR pile. Yet, I felt like the execution of the book was at odds with the story.

For me, the story put me in mind of more diverse version of Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell. It almost seemed as if the characters of Mayor and Maribel were mirror images of Eleanor and Park, but the added twist was that Maribel is mentally handicap. Add to this star-crossed love story the fact that the author never really pins down a *solid* main character and adds in random chapters that are told from the voice of various people in Mayor and Maribel's neighborhood and it's almost like the book really does become just a compendium of "unknown" or lost immigrant Americans. This in itself wouldn't be so bad if the other voices tied into the central storyline better. Instead, they just felt like filler to me that served no real purpose in the overall storyline.

(view spoiler) In a sense, I think my low rating has to do with the fact that I saw loads of potential in the book, but Henriquez just never seems to deliver on it.

I would suggest others read this novel for themselves to make a decision about it. Henriquez's novel is definitely for those individuals who are craving a book that walks a fine line between social commentary on immigration and being a contemporary novel about young star-crossed lovers.

Melissa says

More than anything, I appreciate the fresh perspective and the eye-opening nature of this story. Immigration is a sensitive topic and a political platform in our country right now, there's no denying that. Don't worry, I'm not going to try and tackle that issue in this review. What I will say - **I walked away from this story looking at things a little differently.** It made me feel like the human aspect of the situation is too easily overlooked.

I think we forget that some of these immigrants are just people looking for a better life - a way to take care of their families. That's the case for the Rivera's, at least. They leave behind their extended family, their home, the husband's business; all in an effort to get their daughter some help. They're willing to sacrifice everything to give Maribel the opportunity to attend a special school. A school that could help her make progress after suffering a traumatic brain injury.

"It's amazing, isn't it, what parents will do for their children?"

The family ends up in an apartment building in Delaware that's solely occupied by hispanic immigrants. The author weaves in a few chapters from each of those immigrants, a backstory of sorts on how they ended up in America. I thought it was an interesting touch. There's a complexity to her characters that not every author manages to pull off and it did what I assume she set out to do, added more heart to the story. I have to mention, I wasn't Mayor's biggest fan. I didn't buy the love story aspect. A part of me felt like he was taking advantage of Maribel somehow. Did she truly understand what was happening?

What really struck me was how this family had to essentially let go of a part of their culture. Even simple things, like having to eat processed foods because they couldn't afford to buy the things needed for the recipes they've been eating for their entire lives. This story also made me consider just how hard it would be to live somewhere where you couldn't understand the language, making it almost impossible to communicate. Can you imagine? How would you ask for help? At one point, Alma gets lost and struggles to figure out how to get home. I was panicking for her.

The ending left me completely heartbroken. I honestly saw things going differently and I really wish they had. Overall, I found this to be a heartfelt and thought-provoking story. I wouldn't hesitate to pick up another book from this author.

Alena says

I've waited to post a review of this novel as I try to wrap my mind (and words) around why I liked it so much. This book wants to be a lot of things – love story, issue-oriented novel, independent essays – which should make it a mess, but somehow all work together to make a book that really touched my heart.

The story is told in alternating voices as we meet the residents of an apartment building in Delaware. All the residents are immigrants and all are Spanish-speaking despite their origins in multiple different countries. The bulk of the story, its heart really, is a love story between Panamanian Mayor, whose family has been in the U.S. since he was a few years old, and Maribel, a beautiful but brain injured girl whose family has made the journey from Mexico so she can have a better education. Their journey together, with all its ups and downs, challenges and epiphanies, is the stuff of great YA fiction.

But Henriquez does not stop with the love story. She delves deeper into the lives of their parents and their neighbors. We get to know these immigrants, some of them citizens, some of them illegal in their own voices. This is tricky as Henriquez inhabits over a dozen voices, men and women, young and old.

Obviously immigration is a very sensitive political subject and one that's deeply personal as my father was born in Mexico and came to Chicago as a very young boy. Henriquez does an excellent job of presenting these characters and the issues they face without coming down hard on any side of the political debate. Her characters are simply human.

"I felt the way I often felt in this country -- simultaneously conspicuous and invisible, like an oddity whom everyone noticed but chose to ignore."

"That first day, the words were merely sounds in the air, broken like shards of glass, beautiful from a certain angle and jagged from another."

"People do what they have to do in this life. We try to get from one end of it to the other with dignity and with honor. We do the best we can."

I was touched and moved by the small stories and the central families in this lovely novel.

This is the second Henriquez novel I've read, having previously enjoyed *The World in Half*. She is definitely an author to watch.

K. says

Soooo I wrote an entire review of this book and Goodreads crapped out on me when I hit save. Excuse me while I cry forever.

So let's bullet point this because it's easier:

- This was beautifully written and there were some incredibly poignant lines about the immigrant experience and dealing with racism in America
- Alma's chapters were definitely my favourites. They gave me a lot of feels.
- Mayor's chapters were...kind of a mixed bag for me? I mean, I really liked his perspective. But. He's a typical teenage boy, so.....
- The chapters from the perspectives of the various characters living in the apartment building were wonderful, though at times they felt ever so slightly repetitive.
- I loved seeing Maribel's personality come through due to her friendship with Mayor
- It gave me a lot of feelings, particularly at the end
- I was.....uncomfortable.....about Mayor's physical relationship with Maribel at times. He'd say things like "I could tell she was into it" or "I knew she felt it too". But, like, Maribel has an acquired brain injury. She's incredibly passive as a result of it. Mayor knows this. So, like, USE YOUR WORDS, SON. Make 100% sure that she's into it, don't just assume.

So yeah. I thoroughly enjoyed this, but it did have some slightly problematic aspects.

Naz (Read Diverse Books) says

Review can also be found at my blog: <http://wp.me/p7a9pe-hc>

4.5 STARS

At the heart of *The Book of Unknown Americans* are the Riveras, who managed to secure work Visas after their 15-year-old daughter, Maribel, suffered a traumatic brain injury in Mexico. With legal authorization to work in the U.S., Arturo and Alma Rivera move to Delaware to be near a special-needs school that they hope will help restore their daughter to the lively teenager she once was. In that small, cold, and bleak city in Delaware, the Riveras hope to start a new life. Their new apartment may be small and rundown, and Arturo may only work in a damp and dark warehouse picking mushrooms for a living, but at least Maribel will have a better life in America. Or so they think.

The narrative is divided into several different point of view chapters. Alma is clearly the central character, but a Panamanian teenager, Mayor, also narrates a large part of the story. Upon seeing Maribel for the first time, Mayor is initially struck by her beauty and becomes enchanted with this young mysterious and stoic girl. However, the love that will eventually develop between them will be complicated by the reality of Maribel's condition. In fact, much of the drama will revolve around the complications their relationship will create.

Interspersed throughout the novel are short chapters that allow the various characters we meet throughout the story to come to life in their own words and lend their voice to the narrative of the immigrant experience. These short chapters are what give the book its name and they provide a rebuttal to anti-immigrant rhetoric that is only intensifying in American. All the narrators are neighbors of the Riveras who live in the same apartment complex and they hail from all over Latin America. Below is a snippet narrated by one such neighbor, Micho Alvarez.

We're the unknown Americans, the ones no one even wants to know, because they've been told they're supposed to be scared of us and because maybe if they did take the time to get to know us, they might realize that we're not that bad, maybe even that we're a lot like them. And who would they hate then?

However, despite how much I enjoyed these chapters, I must admit that some of them felt unnecessary. They were moving and beautifully written as well as entertaining, but they did no progress the plot and often appeared to be sanitized accounts with the aim of providing a palatable story of the "model immigrant." These characters could have been humanized to better effect by serving more important roles in the actual plot of the novel instead of serving as the content filler it seemed to be at times.

In the end, *The Book of Unknown Americans* receives my strong recommendation. I devoured the story in 3 sittings, which was incredibly fast for a slow reader like myself. I admit that much of my enjoyment came from the familiar subject matter and my ability to closely relate to the immigrant narrative. But that only speaks to the authenticity with which the story was written.

Daniel Simmons says

Call me cold-hearted but I found this novel both overly simplistic and overly sentimental, with too few genuine characters and too many archetypes who say things to each other like, "Finding is for things that are lost. You don't need to find me, Mayor." Does anybody really talk like that? If the book's simplicity and sentimentality help its overall message -- hey, immigrants are people too! -- gain traction with large groups of readers in the States, great. But just because I sympathize with the author's mission doesn't make me a fan of her writing.

Jeannie says

Updated to 4 stars. I didn't want this book to end. I wanted to follow the characters and see where the rest of their lives took them. I recommend this one.

Louise says

There is very little fiction covering the contemporary Latino immigrant experience so this book may have made the 2014 New York Times Notables List for its content. While the story is good, there is no subtlety. The author's purpose may be to show the goodness of the "unknown Americans", but the characters are not well developed and the details of their lives are not realistic.

Can it really be that a successful couple in Mexico who has researched US schools for special needs students, found a job near that school, figured out the visa system, and arranged an apartment has not prepared themselves for their trip with even a few phrases of English? When they moved their household in a truck, did they really have room to acquire a TV and a mattress along the way? Can a diner cook really support a family of four in a single household? These are only a few of the problems in realism with this book.

The author shows several instances when parents keep their children in the dark. Rafael was not direct in telling Major what he learned at school. Alma does not help Maribel understand the assault. At the end Alma leaves Maribel guessing about something significant and life changing for her about her father, which Maribel (probably because she was kept in the dark) had not even considered at that point; Rafael leaves his son guessing about Maribel's father for far too long.

A number of first person narratives are used, perhaps to fit the title, but they do not relate to the story. Space devoted to this would have been better used in developing the characters and showing perspective on the culture and the family dynamic.

There have been some excellent non-fiction narratives on the contemporary immigrant experience such as those in Matt Taibbi's *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*. There have been only a few other cuts at this material in fiction, most notable being *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. I think that this book has been well received because there represent a hunger for fiction relating the the Latino immigrant experience.

Jana says

RE-READING:

- 1) I listened to it the first time; this time I'll read the book.
- 2) This is our Skype bookclub pick for this month
- 3) I'll meet the author in Vermont in May

FINISHED 1st time: 2/12/15:

I finished this book and wrote my review on my mobile device. Unfortunately, that device has gone the way of the dinosaur and my notes didn't make it to the cloud in time.

For now:

I loved this novel of various immigrants from all over Latin America living in an apartment complex in Delaware. Immigration is a subject I'm very passionate about.

Some of the characters are visited repeatedly and we get to know them very well. A few are single, brief encounters. One of those single stories elevated this to a 5-star novel for me. It should be required reading for all.

I will reread this one soon and perhaps update my review. Meanwhile: highly recommended!

One more thought: I read this while enjoying the lovely people and scenery of Mexico. At one point, we met a guy who spoke flawless English. I asked him where he learned to speak. Over the course of the evening I found out that he had been born in Mexico, but moved with his parents to Texas when he was still a baby.

Three years ago, as a teenager (17-18?), he was sent back to Mexico. All of his siblings, who were born in the US, were allowed to stay, but he was not. He hasn't seen his mom, dad, or siblings since then! The sadness that emanated from him by the time he had shared this was heartbreaking. I wish I could help him somehow. How does this happen? It is so wrong.

Mariah says

This book has been on my To-Read list forever, so I am glad I finally read it :)

This book is told through many points-of-view, but in the book they all end up overlapping somehow.

One family moves to the USA from Mexico after their daughter suffers a near-fatal accident. Their daughter ends up having a Traumatic Brain Injury. The family moves so she can go to one of the best special education schools. They settled down in the Redwood Apartments, a two-story cinderblock complex just off a highway in Delaware. This is where they experienced great friendship and great heartache.

The daughter, Maribel, becomes friends with Mayor Toro, who also lives in the Redwood Apartments. He is a high school sophomore whose family arrived from Panamá fifteen years ago. Mayor sees in Maribel something others do not: her personality and her potential.

This covers many issues that immigrants face and families with a child that has traumatic brain injury. I suggest this book to anyone that wants to learn and know what it is like to live in a completely new country as an immigrant.

Roxane says

What struck me most about this novel is the structure whose purpose becomes clear with the last chapter. It is quite interesting and poignant. This novel is a reminder of how everyone who comes to the United States brings a complicated story with them. In *The Book of Unknown Americans*, immigrants from México, Venezuela, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, etc. live in an apartment complex in Delaware. Though they come from all over the Spanish speaking world, they have more in common than they do not and they form a community--something of a home away from home. Arturo and Alma Rivera have moved from Mexico so their daughter, Mirabel, who suffered an accident on Arturo's construction site, can get the help she needs.

As Arturo and Alma try to make sense of their new life, while keeping an unbearably close eye on their daughter, Maribel is befriended by Mayor Toro who lives with his parents in the complex. Maribel remarks, as their friendship deepens, that Mayor is the only one who sees her and believes she can do anything. Henriquez chronicles their friendship and budding romance with real tenderness and makes it seem like anything is possible with young love.

There are parts of the novel I wish were more fully fleshed out. Interspersed with the main story are testimonials from other residents in the apartment complex and I wanted to know more of their lives. I wanted them to have a more significant role in the story because they were so vividly drawn.

A lovely book, though.

Brina says

Maribel Rivera is a normal teenaged girl in Patzcuaro, Mexico when one day she goes with her mother to her father's work site and suffers a traumatic brain injury. No longer the prize of Patzcuaro, Maribel retreats into a shell, suffers headaches, and can not complete even the most basic school work. Her parents Alma and Arturo Rivera would do anything for their daughter, look up schools for special needs children in the United States, and leave the only life they knew behind and move to Wilmington, Delaware so Maribel can attend Evers School.

Alma and Arturo have a tough time adjusting to life as immigrants, the primary barrier that they have difficulties learning English. One of the reasons why they do not speak English is that they moved to the Kirkwood Apartments managed by Fito Angelino and all the tenants in the building are Hispanic. Not surprisingly, the primary language of communication is Spanish because it gives the immigrants a safety net where they can be themselves as opposed to the lower class people they now are in the world at large. The first friends the Riveras meet are the Toro family, who live in the same building. Henriquez tells half the chapters from the point of view of Alma and the other half from the point of view of Mayor Toro, a boy the same age as Maribel who falls for her immediately. While Alma is expectantly overprotective of Maribel, Mayor gets her to communicate and becomes the only person who understands her. As the friendship develops, so does the relationship between the Rivera and Toro families.

Interspersed in the novel are testimonials from all the immigrant residents of the Kirkwood Apartments where the Rivera and Toro families live. All of these people came to the United States seeking a better way of life, and even though they might not have gained the life they originally sought out, for the most part the immigrants are happy they came. The primary example is the Toro family who fled Panama during Noriega's regime and has been living in Delaware for 15 years. The father Rafael works as a line cook in a restaurant, the family becomes US citizens, the older son Enrique receives a soccer scholarship to the University of Maryland, and the family buys a car. They feel that even though Panama has gotten better, they would not have had the same opportunities there as they would have had living in the United States. This sentiment is shared by the other people in their building, the Riveras included.

The people in this book are the Unknown Americans- a photographer, a small business owner, an army vet, a line cook, parents seeking better lives for themselves and their children. Over the course of the book even Maribel improves in both her school work and long term outlook on life while Alma with the help of Celia Rivera learns rudimentary English. Henriquez paints the United States as still being the land of opportunity for legal immigrants in a post September 11 America.

Of course there are still those white supremacists who wish all the immigrants regardless of status would go back where they come from. Henriquez touches on this as a subplot in the novel with the character of Garrett Miller. At first it appeared that he only desired to bully Maribel and Mayor but his character goes much deeper than that. Despite people like the Millers, however, the immigrants in this book appear to enjoy their day to day life as Americans.

I found *The Book of Unknown Americans* to be from a unique viewpoint. Rather than simply telling a coming of age story of Maribel, Henriquez weaves together the story of many immigrants' experiences. I enjoyed the story of the Riveras and the Toros as well as the other people in the building. I would recommend this to people looking for a short yet poignant read.

Trish says

This story recounts the immigrant experience of a vast array of Latinos on the eastern central coast of America, in Delaware. It moves in for close-ups of two families in particular, one Panamanian and one

Mexican. Both families are legal immigrants, one coming to the United States for medical care, the other for opportunity.

Christina Henriquez manages to make the experiences of these two families ring true and universal. Especially interesting was the voice of Mayor Toro, teenager and younger brother to a high school soccer star. He had a lot to live up to, and his vulnerability was everywhere apparent. His interest in a beautiful but brain-damaged young woman, Maribel, in a nearby apartment led to unforeseen and tragic consequences. The chain of events had a kind of logic to them that began in ignorance and fear, and were sustained by the well-known uncommunicativeness of teenagers.

Henriquez' use of first-person narration, changing the 'voice' from one chapter to another, gave the piece immediacy and truthfulness. Often we can hear an individual thinking and speaking; the overlapping points of view give the story tension and the listener can see a crisis foreshadowed long before the conclusion is revealed. The final chapter is given finally to the father of Mexican family who reveals his pleasure in the struggle they have undergone, despite its many disappointments.

I listened to the audio of this book, performed by an array of narrators and produced by Random House Audio. I was offered this title by Random House in exchange for an honest review.

Ella says

Genre: Fiction, Contemporary

~POV: Multiple points of view from immigrants living in Delaware

We have some re-occurring POVs from the Main Characters intertwined with vignettes from some of the side characters. I loved all the MCs and their stories felt incredibly real and raw. I felt like these could have been real people and it made the stories much more gripping as well.

~Main Theme: Immigration~

Arturo and his family move to America in order for his daughter Maribel to attend a special needs school. She was mentally injured in accident and changed completely from a vibrant full of energy girl to someone who barely speaks and has an attention deficit. They decide the best way to encourage recovery is to attend an American school, hoping that in the process they will get their old daughter back. There they meet and befriend different families of immigrants from Panama, Mexico, Guatemala who have their own interesting backstories and reasons for immigrating. The majority struggle with low-paid jobs and not ideal financial situations.

I guess this spoke even more to me due to being an immigrant myself (and my family as well actually) so I know what it is like to be a stranger in a country very different to your own. Originally from Eastern Europe I ended up living in both England and Spain so I felt their pain in remembering with nostalgia their home country as well the racism towards you that seems unavoidable wherever you go.

~Was I attached to the characters: Yes

Very much so. Arturo and Alma's story went straight to my heart, their pain was raw and visceral. I wish I

could say this was a light hearted novel just so that all of them end up happy but this was nothing like that. It takes you places you didn't really expect and the topics it covers are not light but are necessary. That doesn't mean everything is bleak! It has some powerful tender moments that will make you smile and warm your heart and soul but just as life is, it's not all there is.

~Romance: Yes

Loved the romance between Mayor and Maribel. They saw each other for who they really were and were incredibly sweet and I wish their parents could have seen just how much they needed and helped one another. Even the older couples were interesting to read about though it included a lot of sexism coming from the culture seeping through in their relationship.

~Would I recommend it? Yes

This is such an important novel for anyone who wants to hear about an immigrant's experience and what it feels like to struggle, to fight in a strange country. It will make you either fall in love with it or be crushed by it. Now I am going to wrap myself in a blanket and imagine all these characters getting happy endings xD

Trevor says

This was such a lovely, unexpected read. Poignant & powerful, Henriquez's prose is hauntingly beautiful. A tale about guilt & love & forgiveness, I loved all of the characters, specifically Maribel & Mayor & the relationship that blooms between them. I really enjoyed all of the POVs & believed deeply in the Alma & Arturo standpoint & how much they sacrificed so their daughter could have a chance to start over again. This is a great example of what it means to truly heal after tragedy & how to let go of the pain that you endure of hating yourself/feeling guilty for so long. I would reread this in a heartbeat (after I dig through my TBR list a bit more). The only reason why I didn't give this the full 5* is because of the minor character's POVs; while they never became distracting, I do think they were short & would have liked them to have been more drawn out, to play a larger role with the MCs. Highly recommended!! I am so glad I found this through my GR friends- sometimes the best books are the ones that were never on your radar in the first place.

Diane S ? says

3.5 The immigrant debate and the need for immigrant reform is an issue that has been the forefront of the news in The United States for a number of months. I am not going to give my own opinion on this debate, only mention it as it refers to the timeliness of this novel.

The book mostly centers on two families, one who come to the US from Panama and the devastation wrought by the invasion of the US in 1989 and the other family who come from Mexico in order to get the help and schooling their brain damaged daughter needs, following a horrible accident. These families settle, with other families from many different countries, in an apartment building in Delaware. There they try to make friends and a community with others like themselves.

The author does a wonderful job highlighting the difficulties of these immigrants, who when first arriving speak no English and must trust in those said to be helping them. They are also notoriously easy to being

taken advantage of, as many seem willing to do. The price of things are often a shock, the food so different from what they are used to, the work they are given and the salary they make is below par, to say the least. They are always a moment away from disaster, financially and emotionally.

This novel gives one a great deal to think about, an opportunity to experience the many different ways these new immigrants try to fit in, how desperately they want to be considered Americans.

The romance between the one family's daughter and the son of the other, is almost too sweet, but maybe given the circumstances, understandable. It is a romance that will cause disaster, and a profound change in circumstance. I would have liked to have seen and felt more tension and depth, but despite that this is a worthy, and as mentioned previously, a timely read. Many other characters tell their stories in this novel, so one does get a cross section of many different stories and the many different reasons they come to the US.

ARC from the publisher.

Kkraemer says

According to our government, every American who earns \$50,000 a year contributes \$43.78 to welfare and food stamps. Many Americans resent this deeply. Many are very very committed to being sure that no one "gets away" with this \$43.78, especially anyone who is here from South of the Border.

"Those people....."

All Americans should read this book about "those people." It presents a series of interconnected stories about a family who came to the U.S. to get services for their injured child, a family who came because of violence in their home town, a woman who came because she loves movies and will never be able to be a star at home, a man who sends money for his sons to go to school. Some are "legal." Some are not. Some are from Mexico, some from Guatemala, some from Panama...the people commonly lumped together as a single, uniform group.

Those people.

Their stories are as varied as those of any group of people who operate on the hope that things will get better...if not for them, then for their children.

At the core of this books is a love story, a tender heart breaking love story that makes all of the other stories even more real.

This is a wonderful book.
