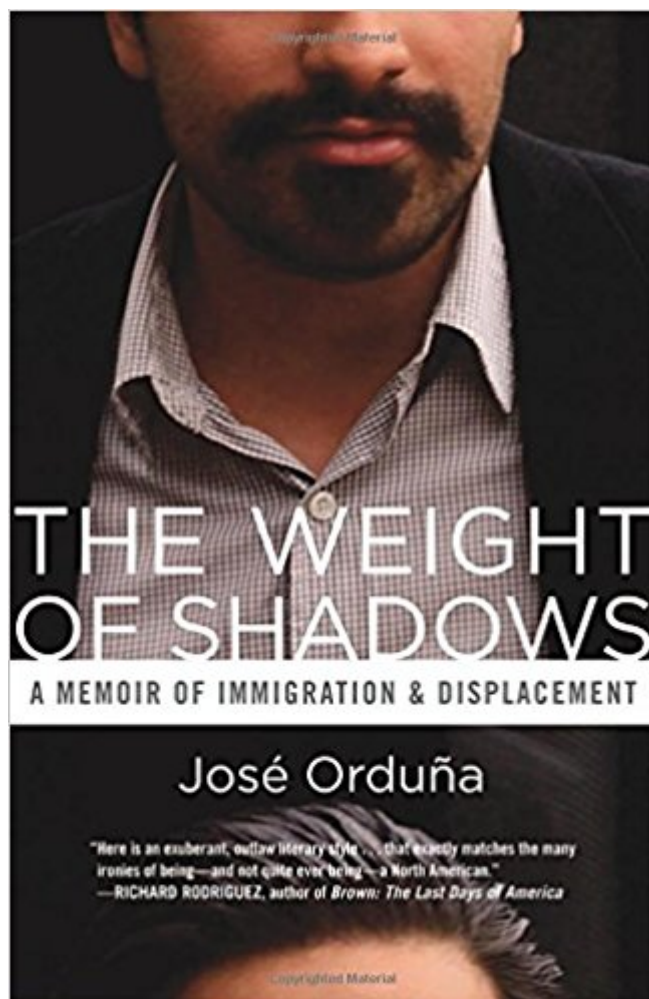


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# The Weight Of Shadows: A Memoir Of Immigration & Displacement



## Synopsis

Tracing his story of becoming a US citizen, Joselyn Orduñez's memoir explores the complex issues of immigration and assimilation. Joselyn Orduñez chronicles the process of becoming a North American citizen in a post-9/11 United States. Intractable realities rooted in the continuity of US imperialism to globalism form the landscape of Orduñez's daily experience, where the geopolitical meets the quotidian. In one anecdote, he recalls how the only apartment his parents could rent was one that didn't require signing a lease or running a credit check, where the floors were so crooked he once dropped an orange and watched it roll in six directions before settling in a corner. Orduñez describes the absurd feeling of being handed a piece of paper—his naturalization certificate—that guarantees something he has always known: he has every right to be here. A trenchant exploration of race, class, and identity, *The Weight of Shadows* is a searing meditation on the nature of political, linguistic, and cultural borders, and the meaning of "America."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Articulate and timely, Orduñez's book probes the underside of the American dream while offering a fierce vision of the way race and class continue to shape government policy in a country that still bills itself as the land of opportunity for all. Sharp-eyed and unsparring. —Kirkus Reviews" "The highly descriptive narrative brings his lived

experience as close to readers as words printed on a page can. This memoir is recommended for readers who understand migration—especially to the U.S.—or are hoping to know more about it and are looking for narratives that exemplify the experience.

**Booklist**—“Ordu’s illuminating story offers a personal look at the experiences of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Memoir readers and those interested in immigration history will find it rewarding.

**Library Journal**—“Ordu’s book violates in a most exciting way a number of literary borders: the political essay is enclosed within a novel; tough political observation is enlivened suddenly by a rush of metaphor or lush detail from the poet’s eye; finally, humor and pathos meet on the page—without papers. Here is an exuberant, outlaw literary style...that exactly matches the many ironies of being—and not quite ever being—a North American.

**Richard Rodriguez**, author of *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*—“Ordu’s wonderfully wry, insightful, and beautiful debut is as deft as they come in nonfiction.

**John D’Agata**, author of *Halls of Fame: Essays*—“The Weight of Shadows is an outstanding debut that instantly places Ordu among the ranks of literature’s best new talent.

**Jerald Walker**, author of *Street Shadows: A Memoir of Race, Rebellion, and Redemption*—“Ordu skillfully weaves personal memoir with deeply researched facts to reveal the disquieting truths no citizen of conscience can afford to ignore.

**Shulem Deen**, author of *All Who Go Do Not Return*—“A provocative and insightful work that is destined to introduce a new form to the world of creative nonfiction...This memoir will no doubt be required reading for years to come.

**Willie Perdomo**, author of *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon*

**José Ordu** was born in Córdoba, Veracruz, and immigrated to Chicago when he was two. He is a graduate of the Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa and active in Latin American solidarity.

I learned a lot reading this book. Ordu skillfully weaves his personal story with information about immigration, politics, geography, and history, viewing a hot button issue through a wide lens as well as an intimate one. His examination of his own status as an immigrant and the process of his naturalization made me consider what it means to be an American and what it can cost.

Perfect book for these troubled times. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in immigration issues. Engaging writing, never dry - even when providing critical data. Should be required reading for the administration-elect.

A worthwhile and engaging read- some insightful gems in this, worthy of much discussion.

This is truly a weighty book. It opens with a jarring note for liberals with the observation of the hope that became contempt immigrants had for Obama. In so many ways, the book was a harbinger of Trump's election and subsequent policies. One section describes a friend's encounter with law enforcement over an illegal U-turn. Orduña is aghast that his friend doesn't seem to grasp that the encounter could well have resulted in the friend's deportation. But the cop let him off with a warning because they were able to make a human connection over "an emergency" being his wife being hungry. "That's not an emergency." "You don't know my wife." Funny stuff. But today, he almost certainly would have been detained and deported. Through vignettes, Orduña examines the big point of what restrictive immigration laws do to our national character, to whom they give power, and whom they harm. It's mostly thoughtful, occasionally angry, and often weary and resigned. At a few points, Orduña's skepticism about various things becomes a little broad, as when he contemptuously refers to the chants of U-S-A U-S-A over the "revenge assassination" of Osama Bin Laden. Well, sure, but he was a conspirator in mass murder who had evaded justice for many years and might yet have been plotting against Americans, so maybe a celebratory response was warranted? This book seems to fit in well with a series of books by young men trying to make sense of their place in modern America. Next up for me, JD Vance's Hillbilly Elegy. Orduña has written a book in the same vein that should get some of the same attention. Recommended.

The USA definitely needs reasonable, respectful discussions on immigration reform, but this book does not provide them. I eagerly anticipated reading it, since immigration deserves serious dialogue (the World Economic Forum considers refugee flow the #1 global concern). By way of credentials, I've worked with overseas refugee/ immigrant communities and am a primary clinician at a health center with a new program dedicated to refugees. We care! This book is at one extreme of a spectrum. Here's its essence: "There's no humane or ethical way to deny people who live in countries riddled with violence, poverty, and corruption the right to try to make a livable life in your affluent country, much less so when your country's government has been deeply

involved in creating the conditions being fled. p.199 in my edition. This is a false dichotomy — supporting the humanity of those who seek to enter the US does not mean supporting an automatic entitlement to enter and stay at will. The argument also provides a false cause — although the US government has given plenty of people (including citizens) varying degrees of a hard time up to and including death, to hubristically say this is the dominant cause of all the world's vastly complex, multifactorial problems is to oversimplify far beyond usefulness, and will deeply obscure an ongoing search for a decent, reasonable solution. The book's main points are overcome by an intensely negative, shallow, emotional onslaught against the author's adopted home. Indeed, it deserves two stars because it helps us understand an immigrant who despises the country they adopted (a valuable perspective, given recent events in Belgium). There are many reasons to favor more open borders, but solutions based primarily on hatred and divisiveness are unlikely to work any better than all the other times they have been used. The book portrays the US as The Great Satan, full of evil people (mostly white, racially speaking) who are usually indifferent (or worse) to the struggles many Latino immigrants face to arrive and stay here. Their equally evil government's foreign policy is the primary source of the world's problems, and that government is staffed at all levels with people happy to see immigrants suffer and die as they cross the Mexico/ US border (in reality, government employees are quite racially diverse and often far more compassionate than the book suggests). Incredibly, the book even demeans the Greek statues and symbols adorning American monuments as if they, too, had some kind of guilt by association. The tone seems a world away from Cesar Chavez or Martin Luther King, who understood such a viewpoint harms everyone. It seemed hypocritical the author didn't walk away from his immigration ceremony into his chosen country before he, too, became part of an evil system. On the bright side, the author provides insights into the experiences of immigrants who risked their lives to illegally cross the Mexico-US border, although he was not part of this group. Last but not least, he tells a moving story of growing up with two parents who loved him and sacrificed for his benefit. Yes, it's disappointing. I thought I'd be reading an informative, credible discussion of an immigrant experience, and did not find it. Sadly, it added very little to my understanding of the complex experiences of the refugee communities I (and many others) work with.

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