

Immigration Policy in the Southeastern United States: Potential for Internal Conflict

ELAINE LEVINE*
ALAN LEBARON**

In the months preceding the publication of this special issue of *Norteamérica* devoted to the topic of immigration in the southeastern United States, three states in the region (Georgia, followed by Alabama and South Carolina) approved stringent Arizona-style immigration enforcement measures. Georgia's House Bill 87 (HB87) sparked intense debate in the state, and civil rights groups immediately filed suit. The two most controversial sections of the Georgia law have been stopped for the time being: on June 27, 2011, a federal judge granted a partial injunction, but 21 of 23 sections took effect on July 1, 2011. Georgia immediately promised to appeal the judge's decision, and the stage now seems set for further acrimonious debate and conflict. The articles included here were first presented as papers at a conference held at Kennesaw State University (KSU) in October 2010.¹ This Conference on Immigration in the Southeast: Defining Problems, Finding Solutions was a sequel to two prior events: the Conference on Georgia's Undocumented Work Force: Dilemmas in Law, Economy and Society, held at KSU in September 2006, and the Conference on Immigration to New Settlement Areas: Trends and Implications, held at the University of South Carolina in 2007. By the time the 2010 conference was held, tensions over immigration-related issues in Georgia and elsewhere had heightened considerably.

Since most of the articles included here deal with specific issues or places, in our introduction we will present general background information about immigration to the Southeast, and how and why it grew so rapidly over the past two decades. We will then briefly comment on local attitudes toward the region's new immigrant

* Researcher and professor at the UNAM Center for Research on North America (CISAN), elaine@unam.mx.

** Professor of Latin American history at Kennesaw State University, alebaron@kennesaw.edu.

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populations, which appeared relatively benign in the first decade of this century, but became increasingly negative up to the time when HB87 took effect in July 2011. To provide readers with additional points of reference and further contextualization for the articles that follow, we present the example of Georgia to explore the threat of these new state laws as perceived by immigrants themselves and by businesses and employers as they face the prospective loss of workers and financial difficulties.

THE SOUTHEAST EMERGES AS A NEW IMMIGRANT DESTINATION

Although not without recurring manifestations of anti-immigrant sentiments, the United States has generally prided itself on being a nation of immigrants, at least until recently. The number of foreign-born rose more or less steadily between 1890 and 1930 (from 9.2 million to 14.2 million), while declining slightly in relative terms from 14.8 percent of the total population to 11.6 percent. These successive waves of immigration, characteristic of various periods in the nation's history were interrupted by the Great Depression and World War II; thus, by 1970, the 9.2 million immigrants residing in the U.S. were only 4.7 percent of the total population (Gibson and Jung, 2006); but immigration began to rise again in the 1970s in both absolute and relative terms, reaching 38.2 million in 2010, or 12.4 percent of the total population. According to Charles Hirschman and Douglas S. Massey (2008: 1), the "magnitude and character" of this recent immigration wave surprised "policy makers and many experts." Most of the new arrivals came from Latin America and Asia, rather than Europe as had previously been the case. In addition, many of these new immigrants settled in non-traditional destinations where their impact was large even when absolute numbers of immigrants were not extremely high. For example, "new immigrants arriving in Georgia, North Carolina, and Nevada may number only in the hundreds of thousands, but in relative terms the growth of the immigrant communities in these areas is frequently off the charts" (Hirschman and Massey, 2008: 3).

Perhaps the region of the United States most surprised by the new immigration was the Southeast, i.e., the 12 states that, with only the exception of Florida, had experienced relatively little immigration for most of the twentieth century.² By the 1990s,

² Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Florida. Because of its special characteristics, Florida in some ways stands apart. The South, which would include Texas and Oklahoma, is generally used to include the Southeast. The authors of the articles published here may at times have used the two terms interchangeably or may not necessarily refer to all of the states generally considered part of the South or the Southeast when using either term.

many southern states found themselves suddenly receiving unprecedented numbers of newcomers, and by the end of the twentieth century the region was attracting growing numbers of immigrants from many parts of the world (Eckes, 2005: 42-3). Several factors came into play that produced this unexpected influx of strangers, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which gave amnesty to many immigrants allowing them to move more freely through the country just as new job opportunities were opening up in many southeastern states. For example, throughout the 1990s, demand increased in the Southeast for low-wage workers in construction, food processing (particularly poultry processing plants), custodial, and maintenance and similar industries. Since employers could not attract sufficient numbers of local laborers, they began actively recruiting Latino immigrants, and also announced openings in flyers and newspapers and on billboards in Mexico and Central America (Mohl, 2005 and 2009; Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2009). Active recruitment no longer became necessary as communities of immigrants were established, and by the end of the 1990s “chain migration facilitated employer recruitment efforts” (Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009: xvi). As Zúñiga and Hernández-León have explained in reference to immigrant workers in the carpet mills of Dalton Georgia, “In the early 1990s, carpet industrialists briefly resorted to recruitment of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in South Texas,” but immigrants themselves created communication networks that “soon assumed the role of recruiters and fostered the exponential growth of Mexicans in Dalton and other new destinations” (2009: 38). Similar processes occurred in various other industries in many localities throughout this “new destination” region, the Southeast.

Since the Southern defeat in the United States Civil War in 1865, the Southeast had generally grown more slowly than other parts of the country and, until the civil rights movement began to bear fruit, the region had remained mired in racist laws that kept African-Americans lawfully segregated from whites. But national and global forces began to encourage change, including the heightened international competition that forced the United States into a process of economic restructuring and industrial reorganization, downsizing, and outsourcing that began changing the country’s economic landscape in the late 1970s. Many factories and plants in the typically more industrialized Northeast and parts of the Midwest shut down and relocated to other countries, or at best to the Southeast, as they searched for a cheaper and more flexible work force. In addition to a relatively abundant supply of labor with anti-union traditions, southern states offered developable land, tax breaks, and other incentives to attract both domestic and foreign investment and bring new industries into the region (Murphy, Blanchard, and Hill, eds., 2001; Cobb and Stueck, eds., 2005; Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009). The Southeast became known as part of the “Sun Belt”

in reference to the somewhat milder climate and in contrast to the term “Rust Belt” used to identify the now literally rusting, obsolete, and abandoned industrial sites in and around some cities in the Northeast and Midwest. By the 1980s and 1990s, the southern states had become the country’s most economically dynamic region, and according to James Cobb, also the “most globalized” in attracting foreign businesses; thus “one of eight manufacturing workers in the South now gets his or her paycheck from a foreign employer” (2005:1). Several foreign automobile makers (Mercedes, Honda, Hyundai) built factories in the region (Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009: xiv). The Southeast’s booming economy demanded labor, and while local workers were not as willing to accept low-wage jobs in construction, food processing, cleaning and maintenance services, and similar positions, immigrants became a hardworking, docile labor force, willing to work in dangerous conditions and easily expendable (Murphy, Blanchard, and Hill, eds., 2001; Cobb and Stueck, eds., 2005; Massey, ed., 2008; Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009; Stuesse, 2009).

Construction and poultry processing, both high growth industries in the Southeast, were major players in attracting immigrant labor for jobs that locals disdained. Poultry processing in particular was distasteful work for U.S. citizens, and with the willing labor of immigrants “Americans eat almost twice as much chicken per capita (89.1 pounds annually) as they did in 1980 (48 pounds)” (Stuesse, 2009: 91). In certain circles in Atlanta, it is a well-known fact that undocumented Latino workers were actively recruited so that the necessary infrastructure for city’s 1996 Olympic Games would be ready on time (Amescua, 2006). Much of the continuing building boom throughout the Southeast continued to employ undocumented workers until the economic downturn.

There are numerous other examples of industries that increasingly came to rely on immigrant labor in the boom years of the 1990s and early 2000s, such as Louisiana’s oil fields and ship yards, lumbering activities in various states, or hospitality and food preparation services throughout the region. Immigrants, and in particular Latino immigrants, as Odem and Lacy point out, provided “a flexible, low-cost labor pool that ... not only boosted corporate profits but also reduced costs for consumers” (2009: xxi). For many obvious reasons immigrants were more willing than native workers to accept temporary and seasonal employment, thereby providing many employers with a “just-in-time” labor force. Thus immigrant labor “fueled the economic growth and competitiveness of key southern industries such as poultry processing, forestry, textiles, carpets and rugs, construction, landscaping, hospitality, and agriculture” (Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009: xxi). Immigrant populations also revitalized many small towns and rural communities. Immigration status was often overlooked or ignored during this time, as evidenced in the agricultural industry. Underlining the importance

of Mexican migrant workers, Duchon and Murphy recall that when what was then the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raided the Vidalia onion fields at harvest time, “Georgia’s senior senator flew down from Washington to arrange a truce between growers and INS to make it possible for the harvest to be completed” (2001: 8).

Fast-paced immigration to the Southeast included people from many different origins. According to Duchon and Murphy, the “strong economic performance of the South at a time when the nation was under increasing pressure to admit refugees from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Africa led the State Department to choose the region as a target area in which to settle refugees who were not being sponsored by family members in other parts of the country” (2001: 1). However, the largest and hence the most visible group of immigrants were from Latin America, the majority from Mexico but including significant numbers from Central America, Brazil and elsewhere. These growing numbers of immigrants, hailing from many different parts of the world, are particularly significant because, as many authors have pointed out (Mohl, 2009), up until fairly recently, ethnic relations in the Southeast had been essentially the relations between white citizens and black citizens. Nevertheless, the southeastern states did begin to experience significant changes in the 1950s and 1960s as the civil rights movement gained momentum. By the end of the twentieth century, contrary to prior trends, this was the fastest growing region in the country. Recently there has been a growing body of literature, both academic and other, about what is referred to as the “New South” and even the “New Latino South,” given the high proportion of Mexicans and other Latinos in the region’s newly arrived immigrant population.³

As a result of these changes, seven of the ten states with the highest immigrant population growth rates over the past decade (2000-2009) are located in the Southeast: South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, and North Carolina (Migration Policy Institute, 2011a). Five of these states (North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky) were also among the top ten in the previous decade (1990-2000), when growth of the foreign-born population was particularly high overall; South Carolina ranked eleventh then, and all six states showed increases of over 100 percent. Such high growth rates were to some extent due to the small numbers of immigrants residing in these states prior to 1990. Nevertheless, Georgia (fourth place) and North Carolina (ninth) were also among

³ The term “New South” has been used at various times to underline significant changes that took place in this part of the U.S. Because of its history of slave-based plantation agriculture, the South was considered less permeable to change than other parts of the country. It seems that the expression was used for the first time in the aftermath of the Civil War in reference to the fact that slavery had been abolished. It was also used after the civil rights movement finally achieved desegregation of schools and public spaces in the South.

the top 10 states with the largest absolute growth in their foreign born populations (343 000 and 235 000, respectively) from 2000 to 2009. Furthermore Georgia is in ninth place in terms of the total number of immigrants residing in the state (an estimated 920 000 in 2009). Virginia ranks eleventh (with 806 000) and North Carolina is fourteenth (665 000).

According to Pew Hispanic Center estimates, approximately 500 000 undocumented Mexicans per year entered the U.S. between 2000 and 2005 (Passel and Cohn, 2011). It is also quite likely that the number of Latinos in the U.S. has been underestimated. As Mohl points out in reference to official Census Bureau estimates, “Actual Hispanic population counts are much higher, perhaps as much as twice as high in many southern cities, counties, and states according to local sources” (2005: 75). Johnson and Kasarda (2009: 70-71) estimated that a total of 600 913 Hispanics resided in North Carolina in 2004 as opposed to the American Community Survey figure of 506 206 for that year. According to Elaine Lacy, “The actual number of Latinos in South Carolina is likely at least twice that reported by the U.S. Census Bureau” (2009: 3). The rapidly rising numbers of Latinos in the Southeast—most of whom are presumed to be immigrants, most likely undocumented—is no doubt one of the factors that has contributed to the anti-immigrant sentiments and hence the punitive legislation approved recently in various states.

LOCAL AND STATEWIDE RESPONSES TO NEW IMMIGRANTS

During the initial years when immigrants supplied much of the dynamic force behind the growth of the Southeast, there was relative tolerance for the immigrants, who began to build communities and families in the hopes of finding permanent homes. Examining the 1990s, in their introduction to the book *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South*, Duchon and Murphy wrote the following:

One would probably expect such populations to have a hard time in the South, and indeed in some cases at the beginning of the new phase of immigration service providers were concerned for the very lives of the new residents (Viviano, 1986). After all, the South has a history of racial intolerance, xenophobia, and poverty. Quite the opposite, however has been true in the long run. After some difficult early years during which Mexicans, Asians, and other immigrants were subjected to racial and ethnic intolerance, the traditional ethnic groups (white and black) of the region have begun to appreciate and value the contributions newcomers have made. (2001: 2)

In their chapter in this same book, John D. Studstill and Laura Nieto-Studstill explored how “new Latins” have been received by “the long-term residents” in two unnamed Georgia counties, simply referred to as “Fruit County” and “Tobacco County”:

Some of the Euro and Afro working class may not have been as welcoming of the new immigrants as the Euro employers have been, although we found little evidence of overt hostility. Since the Mexicans still account for only 5 percent of the population in a growing economy, they are not yet perceived as a threat....It would appear that in neither county has competition for jobs created hostility between the locals and the newcomers, but this situation could change in an economic downturn....The integration of the new Latins in both counties seems to have been almost too good to be true. It is worth noting, however, that in Fruit County at least, a concerted effort spearheaded by the big growers was organized to head off problems....Our research suggests that hospitality has largely outweighed hostility towards the new immigrants in rural Georgia. The hospitality probably stems from economic self-interest ..., and so the situation could change if economic conditions worsen....But in the meantime, the relative prosperity of the region has made it possible for the Latins to be given perhaps a surprisingly positive welcome. (2001: 78-80)

It should be noted that these excerpts are taken from texts written before September 11, 2001, and they refer to the fact that newly arrived Latinos and other immigrants were “at that time” generally received well in the southeastern states in spite of the region’s past history of intolerance and racial discrimination. However, this observable yet unexpected tolerance for the newcomers might well have stemmed from the fact that for many employers and other local residents, “brown” immigrant workers were considered to be more desirable –or at least less undesirable– than blacks. As Hirschman and Massey point out, “Especially in the South, Americans are used to thinking in black and white racial terms –literally and figuratively– and are still unsure about what to make of the new brown-skinned arrivals” (2008: 12). In terms of attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in general, 9/11 definitely marked a sea change nationwide and of course in the South as well. Since then it has become more politically acceptable to be suspicious of immigrants, and in many states it is now extremely popular and politically expedient to vociferously oppose “illegal immigration.”

In addition to 9/11, as numbers of immigrants increased so rapidly, citizens throughout the Southeast grew alarmed. As mentioned above, seven of the ten states with the highest rates of growth in their immigrant populations over the past decade (2000-2009) are in the Southeast and two of these (Georgia and North Carolina) are also in the top ten in terms of absolute or numerical growth (Migration Policy

Institute, 2011a). It is probably no coincidence that these same seven states were among the top ten in terms of Latino population growth from 2000 to 2010, even though, of course, not all Latinos are immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011); indeed only 40 percent of the Latino population in the U.S. is foreign-born (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). However, about three-quarters (76 percent) of the unauthorized immigrant population, estimated at 11.9 million in 2008, are Latinos, and a majority (59 percent), approximately 7 million, are from Mexico. Furthermore, “Unauthorized immigrants are spread more broadly than in the past into states where relatively few had settled two decades ago. This is especially true in Georgia, North Carolina, and other Southeastern states” (Passel and Cohn, 2009: i-ii). Nevertheless, 73 percent of the children of unauthorized immigrant parents were born in the U.S. and hence are citizens (Passel and Cohn, 2009).

The number of children attending public schools whose first language is not English has been cause for concern in many school districts in the Southeast. In the case of Georgia, for example, the number of Asian children enrolled throughout the state more than doubled between 1995 and 2010, jumping from 19 546 to 53 369. The number of Hispanic children increased eight times, soaring from 23 632 to 189 684. Hispanic children now constitute 11.4 percent of total K-12 school enrollment, up from 1.9 percent in 1995. In Gwinnett County, just north of Atlanta, Hispanic enrollment in 2010 was 24.8 percent of the total and reached almost 70 percent in some of the county’s elementary schools. In Gainesville, where poultry processing is a fundamental economic activity, 54.4 percent of the children enrolled in city schools are Hispanic, as are 67 percent of those in Dalton, a textile manufacturing center (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). By 2009, 18.8 percent of the children under 18 residing in the state had at least one foreign-born parent. Furthermore, of the 459 000 children in the state with at least one immigrant parent in 2009, 83 percent (381 000) were U.S. citizens by birth (Migration Policy Institute, 2011b).

For most of this recent period with a rapidly rising immigrant population—whose U.S. born children are probably also perceived by many as somehow “foreign”—the U.S. economy was also growing rapidly. Annual GDP growth averaged 2.96 percent from 1992 through 2006, and even surpassed 4 percent from 1997 through 2000 (U.S. Council of Economic Advisers, 2011). At the same time unemployment was low and remained under 5 percent for most of the years between 1997 and 2007. Hence immigrant workers were a much needed addition to the labor force. This was particularly true in the Southeast where economic growth and employment growth were quite high.

In 2006, even before the onset of the recession, Georgia passed a law prohibiting public sector employment of undocumented immigrants, along with other employ-

ment restrictions, and prohibiting their access to almost all public services and benefits, except prenatal and emergency medical attention. At the time, it was referred to in the *Southeast Farm Press* as “one of the toughest immigration laws in the country” and as a matter of great concern for Georgia’s farmers, who had “become increasingly dependent on migrant labor” (Hollis, 2006). Between 2007 and 2009 four Georgia counties (Cobb, Hall, Whitfield, and Gwinnett) established 287(g) agreements with the federal government thereby authorizing local law enforcement officers, with appropriate training, to detain and process undocumented immigrants. Each of these four counties is among those with either the highest percentages or the highest numbers of Latinos in the state.

Odem and Lacy found that the “scant attention given new immigrants in the [southeast] region during the 1990s tended to be positive, more often than not” (2009, 144), but from the early twenty-first century, a combination of 9/11, weakening economies, the rapid growth in immigrant numbers, and a national anti-immigration movement hardened attitudes and began the demands for draconian laws. It seems as if Studstill and Nieto-Studstill were prescient about what the future held, despite the optimism they expressed in 2001 about “hospitality” having outweighed “hostility.” These authors pointed out that “Mexicans” were “not yet perceived as a threat” (at that time) because they accounted for only a small percentage of the population (5 percent) in the context of “a growing economy.” Furthermore, they insisted repeatedly that the situation could change “in an economic downturn” or “if economic conditions worsen.” They mentioned “economic self-interest” as one of the motivating factors behind the tolerance and acceptance shown toward the new immigrants. They also indicated that there was “one area of concern” that could potentially increase friction: the presence of “many undocumented workers” (2001: 78-80). Thus, they had in fact outlined what would take place over the course of the next decade. It seems quite clear that these three conditioning factors (the anti-immigrant sentiments that prevailed after 9/11, the rising numbers of recent immigrants, and the severe recession that set in at the end of 2007) coinciding near the end of the last decade combined with the vestiges of racism and intolerance that persisted in the region to transform what had been an apparently welcoming—or at least tolerant—environment into an openly hostile one. Meanwhile, politicians increasingly joined the rhetoric as they positioned themselves to garner votes, often leading the pack in surprising statements such as Governor Sonny Perdue’s assertion during a news conference on September 6, 2006, that “it is simply unacceptable for people to sneak into this country illegally on Thursday, obtain a government-issued ID on Friday, head for the welfare office on Monday, and cast a vote on Tuesday” (*The Augusta Chronicle*, 2006).

NEW STATE IMMIGRATION LAWS

In May of 2011, Georgia passed another law (HB87), once again referred to as “one of the nation’s toughest immigration enforcement measures” (Redmon, 2011b). To be phased in between January 1, 2012 and July 1, 2013 by size, all businesses with over 10 employees will be required to use government data to verify that new hires have proper work documents. Use of false identification to obtain employment in Georgia could mean up to 15 years in prison and up to US\$250 000 in fines. As passed and signed, the law would have allowed local and state police to investigate a person’s immigration status. However, this provision was blocked by a federal court decision along with another that would have penalized those “who transport or harbor illegal immigrants” (Leslie, 2011). Federal judges have also prevented similar laws in Arizona and Utah from taking effect thus far.

Nevertheless, and in spite of these rulings, Alabama and then South Carolina passed similar, and in some aspects even more restrictive, anti-immigrant measures. The Alabama law, if allowed to take effect, in addition to requiring all businesses to use E-Verify, would require “schools to find out if students are in the country lawfully,” make “it a crime to knowingly give an illegal immigrant a ride,” “allow police to arrest anyone suspected of being an illegal immigrant if the person is stopped for some other reason,” and “make it a crime for landlords to knowingly rent to an illegal immigrant” (Johnson, 2011). South Carolina’s law, in addition to requiring businesses to use E-Verify, “requires police to check the immigration status of any person whom they suspect of being undocumented when that person is arrested or stopped for any other reason” (Mustufa, 2011). It will be a “misdemeanor for any adult in the state to not carry official identification, like a driver’s license or immigration document, while traveling in South Carolina, and further makes it a felony to provide or sell fake photo IDs for undocumented immigrants” (Mustufa, 2011).

One of the sponsors of the Alabama law “said it would help the unemployed by preventing illegal immigrants from getting jobs in the state” (Johnson, 2011). Similar arguments were invoked by supporters of Georgia’s HB87 who claimed that “illegal immigrants...are taking jobs from state residents and burdening Georgia’s public schools, hospitals, and jails” (Redmon, 2011b). In contrast, certain business groups representing the state’s agricultural, landscaping, restaurant, and tourism industries have voiced stiff opposition to the measure. “These groups fear that the law will damage the state’s economy by scaring away migrant workers and conventioners” (Redmon, 2011b). How the battle over immigration will play out remains highly uncertain, and while some of the early fears may have been abated by the injunction, immigrants remain in a precarious condition.

IMPACT OF NEW LAWS ON THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN GEORGIA⁴

In Georgia, as in much of the South, the 1990s and the early 2000s were the golden years of opportunity for undocumented immigrants, as jobs were plentiful, and local governments fined and released those caught driving without a license or who committed other minor infractions. Although employer abuse and wage theft were commonly committed by numbers of Georgia's citizens, immigrants found that many employers were grateful for their hard work and treated them well. Often local churches proved happy to have new members in the congregation; and hundreds of new churches were established catering specifically to immigrants. Non-profits, churches, and well-meaning individuals offered various forms of assistance, and for many immigrants, it appeared that Georgia could become their home.⁵ In addition, until 2007 there appeared to be a realistic chance that Congress would pass some measure of comprehensive immigration reform to allow immigrants a path to permanent residency and citizenship, a possibility that added immense hope to an already very hopeful era. The results of Guthey's 2001 study of North Georgia in the late 1990s, which found that Latino immigrants were establishing stable communities and increasingly spending money to develop their own households rather than sending money home, would have been true in much of the state.

As a "case example inside a case example," we can look at the small town of Canton, Georgia, where the Maya Heritage Community Project at Kennesaw State University has worked closely with several hundred Guatemalan Maya since 2001. In the late 1990s, Canton had around 6000 residents when a boom began that made it the fastest growing town in Georgia and the fifth fastest in the nation by 2005. The 2010 census for Canton claims over 22 000 residents, with over 5000 Hispanics. Undocumented workers had been the work force behind tremendous growth and development in Canton, and during the late 1990s and early 2000s immigrants worked in the economy openly to the apparent gratification of Canton residents. A day labor pickup station operated by an alliance of local churches gave out food and shelter as day workers waited for private homeowners and contractors to pick them up, and some Canton politicians supported driver's licenses for immigrants as a public safety policy. The chicken plant was the largest single place of immigrant employment in

⁴ The information presented in this section draws upon Alan LeBaron's personal relationships with immigrants through the Maya Heritage Community Project, recent news reports, and over 400 responses to a survey conducted at the Guatemalan Consulate in June 2011.

⁵ Possibly not so well-meaning were the banks and real estate agents that encouraged hundreds of families to purchase homes, leading to great losses for many immigrants.

those early days, but no one seemed too openly suspicious about the large number of workers at the plant with Puerto Rican identification, at the same time that their poultry bosses called them Guatemalans.

By 2005, appearances gave the strong impression that approximately one-half the town was immigrant; moreover large numbers of immigrant children many of whom did not speak English, began attending the schools; in fact the children of the Guatemalan Maya often learned the Mayan language at home and therefore did not speak fluent Spanish either. Moreover, the medical clinics and hospitals found themselves with a growing number of expectant mothers; indeed, to Canton residents the situation had become problematic, and when some local high school boys were arrested and convicted of beating up and robbing workers, it was clear that the basic mood of the people blamed the immigrants for being there (Moser, 2005). Another illustration of the mood of the time was residents' angry response to immigrants riding the free, federally funded city bus. A local Maya group had agreed to help the Canton bus Transportation Department teach immigrants how to ride the free city bus, a campaign so successful that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* wrote an article on the program, with photos of Guatemalan Maya immigrants getting on the bus (Borden, 2005). The publicity immediately killed the project after city residents, not wanting to give free rides to immigrants or to encourage their presence, complained to City Hall and caused the Transportation Department to stop the alliance.⁶

Immigrants have legitimate reason to fear HB87. Since 2005, Georgia's immigration laws became increasingly focused on the goal of driving out undocumented immigrants, and to deny rights and privileges to those who remain. In her article published in 2010, Debra Sabia claimed that Georgia's "rogue political culture" and "strong traditions of localism and exclusionary politics" contributed to legislation that tore families apart and resulted in "abuses by police forces, raised racial tensions, and created serious employment difficulties for businesses" (73). During the months that HB87 was discussed in the Spanish-language media, knowledge of the bill became widespread among immigrants, and fear began to verge on panic. Although the law stated that police officers would need a legitimate reason to check a person's documents, many thought the police would act aggressively, and rumors were spreading that starting on July 1, police would begin clearing the streets of everyone standing for day labor; or (in the words of one young worker) "who looked to be from Mexico."

Soon after HB87 passed, reports and testimonies surfaced indicating that large numbers of immigrants were considering leaving Georgia, and by June examples

⁶ LeBaron participated in this project; thus, this information is based on personal knowledge.

became widespread of immigrants exiting areas throughout the state. Churches, apartment building managers, employers, and farm owners all noted a sudden exodus, as demonstrated by a heavy increase in traffic at Atlanta's consulates where consulate workers perceived serious distress among people waiting long hours in crowded waiting rooms to obtain passports and other documents.⁷ According to the Honorable Beatriz Illescas Putzeys, Atlanta Consul General of Guatemala, whose office ministers to most of the Southeast except Florida, their office processed over 1000 passport applications just for Georgia in the month of June 2011, while in June 2010 there had been 542 passport applications. Even more people were seeking marriage documents, a necessary part of keeping families together, with over 1100 applications in June 2011, compared to 238 in June 2010, an increase of over 400 percent. Alabama numbers also doubled from 2010 to 2011.⁸ As the consulate lacked the capacity to deal with high numbers, people often had to return another day before reaching the front desk, and the staff realized that dozens of people were gathering hours before dawn, with over 200 people (men, women, and children) waiting at the hour of opening. "We don't have enough staff or machines to cope with the crowds; at the end of the day they sometimes try to steal the sign-in sheet to make sure they stay on the waiting list," said a consulate worker.

News reports of migrant farm workers avoiding Georgia and leaving the agricultural industry without sufficient workers became commonplace; for example the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that according to the agricultural industry, "they have only two-thirds or half the workers they need now and for the weeks of harvesting to come" with the potential loss of US\$300 million (Redmon, 2011a). In addition to the plethora of state and local news sources, *The Economist* reported on the lack of agricultural workers in Georgia and the probable effects of HB87 causing a further decline, which "could portend disaster for farmers" (2011). But, of course, it is not only farmers who will be hurt by an exodus of workers, for Georgia has hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers in its work force, and despite the high unemployment rate, filling these jobs with adequate replacements would be problematic. As Charles Kenny commented in the *Bloomberg Businessweek*, "if forced to do without illegal labor, vast sectors of the U.S. economy, from agriculture to construction, would founder –not to mention the putting greens infested with crab grass and the children who would run riot without care" (Kenny, 2011).

⁷ Various testimonies; see also Guevara, 2011.

⁸ Data supplied by the Consulate General.

Interviews with Immigrants

Undocumented immigrants know the consequences of deportation; most, if not all, have known families torn apart and heard testimonies of the hardships and the indignities of staying in ICE detention centers for long periods while awaiting final deportation. The fears include the hardships they face in their home countries, in particular for those from areas of greatest poverty or high crime, where a common fear is that criminals will target them or their children for ransom believing that people returning from the United States will have bank accounts with money. To capture the people's sentiments, their stories, and their plans, the Guatemalan Consulate, with the help of the Maya Heritage Community Project at Kennesaw State University, conducted short interviews with people as they waited for services in the consulate offices. Not everyone wanted to answer the questions and some refused; staff who did the interviews said that some people expressed their anger at waiting long periods for assistance. However, over a three-week period, over 400 interviews were conducted, and although they were not done under controlled circumstances, and interviewees came not only from Georgia but also from Alabama, South and North Carolina, and Tennessee, the overall results give insights into immigrant sentiments. The questions relevant to this article are the following:

"Are you thinking of leaving the state where you live?" Just over one-half of participants said yes.

"Before the new laws were passed, did you feel content in the USA?" The "yes" responses were close to unanimous: 377 people said they felt content before the laws were passed and only 13 said no.

The interviewers also asked "Do you think the new laws are just?" Again, almost everyone thought the new laws were unjust; although a few said the laws were just, "for them [Anglos]." Some believed the laws were designed specifically to be against Latinos; and some spoke of racism as a motive. Several respondents explained the laws as unjust because undocumented workers were doing no harm, and that they had come to the U.S. for the valid reasons of looking for work and security. For example, the laws were unjust "because we are left defenseless and we live in fear, and no one is doing anything"; "they're sending us to our countries without asking themselves the reasons we had for coming here"; "because we're not doing any harm and they're throwing us out for no reason"; and "because they aren't giving us the chance to have a future."⁹

⁹ For an excellent report that indicated similar feelings among immigrants, see Guevara (2011).

Besides being disappointed and afraid, some people apparently felt tricked into having had the hope of becoming citizens, because many aspects of the United States had made them feel valuable and accepted. Employers sought them out, as did churches and other organizations; their children have been born in the United States as citizens; and salespeople cheerfully encourage buying houses, cars, and furniture, and opening bank accounts. Especially the very poorest of the immigrants have come to admire not only the better economic opportunities in the United States, but the relative safety and lack of corruption among officials. A Guatemalan immigrant, Juan Nicolás, in the month before his final immigration hearing and his subsequent deportation with his wife and three U.S.-born children, said that he admired the United States for its system of laws that gave people safety and the right to education. "I have learned that we all have rights; the entire world has rights, in the USA there are laws everywhere, but that law is good for you."¹⁰ Juan believed until the last day that the judge would see him for an honorable man and grant him permanent residency.

FUTURE TRENDS

Several polls taken in the state of Georgia in the middle of first decade of the century indicated that the majority of citizens were willing to accept a comprehensive law that allowed some path to citizenship; these results were similar to a number of national polls. In spite of this, Georgia residents have hardened in recent years. Bohon and Macpherson Parrot came to the conclusion that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* helped sway Georgia's residents to harder opinions on immigration, for, "as we examined articles and editorials on unauthorized immigration in the *AJC*, we found a pattern of inflammatory language use, uncritical parroting of the 'illegal problem,' and the conflation of unauthorized immigration and Hispanic immigration, especially since 2005" (2011: 111).¹¹ In the opinion of several Maya Guatemalans interviewed in the Maya Heritage Community Project, the marches and public rallies by pro-immigrant groups may have had an adverse effect on public opinion. Probably the most credible overarching reason for the intensity and strength of the anti-immigrant groups and their influence over politicians would be connected to the Great Recession and continuing economic troubles, and, of course, nativism.

¹⁰ In conversation with Alan LeBaron.

¹¹ Although Atlanta has excellent Spanish-language newspapers and news sources, including the major paper owned by the *AJC*, comprehensive coverage is seldom achieved in the English language.

Much remains uncertain with the ongoing fragile economy in the United States, the severely divided society, and the uncertain fate of the anti-immigrant laws as they make their way through the courts. Pro-immigrant groups remain small and have little power in the South, and creating an effective alliance between black and Latino human rights groups has proved problematic. Business interests have strongly lobbied elected state and national representatives for some time, but mainly as back-room politics; however, as the laws have become more draconian, businesses have become more open in admitting the need for immigrants, and calls have been made to increase temporary worker programs. Indeed, although anti-immigration forces have obtained a strong hold on much of the Southeast, the economic consequences of the laws and the resultant anger and desperation among affected businesses will inevitably produce increased consideration of temporary worker programs as a compromise. Since they are temporary and do not confer immigrants with significant rights, anti-immigrants might be persuaded, while the large middle groups neither pro- nor anti- can continue to sit things out. But temporary worker programs will produce their own basket of problems: for example, must we prohibit marriage or sex to prevent children being born in U.S. territory? Will “temps” continue to be hard-working and skillful when creating homes and families is no longer a possibility? Will the fruit be bitter without the picker’s fingers being sweetened by the American Dream? As researchers and academics, perhaps we must increase our involvement and find new ways to educate the sections of the public who may bring back a stronger middle group willing to accept comprehensive reforms. We hope the articles presented here will contribute to that aim.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Based on extensive field work carried out between January 2006 and May 2010, Cristina Amescua explores the perceptions residents of Gwinnett County, in metropolitan Atlanta, have formed about the Mexican immigrants who began to arrive in significant numbers in the mid-1990s. She clarifies from the beginning that neither Mexican immigrants nor native-born southerners are homogeneous groups, despite certain preconceived notions they tend to have formed about one another. In the article, she explores native residents’ ideas about Mexicans with respect to their economic impact on host communities, criminal activity, and their status in the U.S. as either legal residents or unauthorized immigrants. Amescua points out that the emphasis placed on this last issue can be an effective mechanism for camouflaging xenophobic and discriminatory ideas behind a “politically correct” discourse.

However, she also refers to a significant appreciation for “Mexican culture,” which is perceived to include hard work, family values, and religious devotion, along with a rich cuisine and colorful festivals. In general, it seems that both positive and negative ideas voiced by many longtime residents of the Southeast about their new neighbors are based on preconceived ideas and casual observations in public spaces, but very little direct contact or interaction. Furthermore, the author mentions Mexican migrants’ references to brief direct encounters with native residents and the idea they have formed that many of them, “but definitely not all,” can be both kind and helpful. Amescua concludes that more direct interaction in schools, churches, and other social spaces will help both groups eventually move closer to mutual appreciation and understanding.

In their article, Mary Odem and Irene Browne analyze how different groups of Latino immigrants experience new forms of “racialization” upon settling in the U.S. South. They raise the question as to whether these newcomers are “pushing the boundaries of existing categories to create new binaries –white/non-white or black/non-black” – or perhaps “forging new, multiple categories of race that place many of them in the middle” between what has traditionally been perceived in this region as white or black. They selected metropolitan Atlanta as the site for their inquiry, given its importance as a business and financial capital, the fact that it is the main transportation hub in the Southeast, and the dramatic growth of its foreign-born population over the past two and a half decades.

They compare the experiences of Guatemalan and Dominican immigrants, along with some obligatory references to Mexicans as the largest group of Latinos in metro Atlanta, to show how “different groups bring divergent resources and understandings of ‘race’ with which to navigate racialization processes.” They analyze the differences in gender composition, educational attainment, and occupations between these two groups as well as “their own racial and ethnic identity, constructed through the specific history and racial projects of their respective countries of origin.” The authors explain that being considered “*indio*” has a very different and much more favorable connotation in the Dominican Republic than in Guatemala.

According to Odem and Browne neither of the two groups identifies strongly with the pan-ethnic category of Hispanic or Latino. Furthermore, class also interacts or “intersects” with processes of racialization. Hence “for dark-skinned Dominicans who are members of the middle class, being perceived as black does not *necessarily* entail a process of marginalization, given Atlanta’s large African-American elite.”

Kathleen Griesbach’s article discusses how the two major programs for collaboration between the federal and local governments for immigration enforcement, 287(g) and Secure Communities, have been implemented in North Carolina. Her

point of departure is that many of the concerns raised by the federal government, when challenging the legality of Arizona's SB1070, are in fact applicable to the aforementioned programs as applied in North Carolina and elsewhere in the U.S. She explains "how the criminal and immigration systems interact with each other...in these enforcement collaborations" to produce results that are contrary to the programs' originally stated goals of "identifying and deporting immigrants who have been convicted of serious criminal offenses." Griesbach refers to both government and outside reports, as well as other evidence, showing that most immigrants processed for removal through these local-federal collaborations have not been charged with any serious crime and sometimes have not even been charged with a criminal offense at all. Thus, these programs have "caused a surge in deportations of immigrants for many minor infractions, contrary to their stated intent."

The author refers to the "context of a broad expansion of immigration enforcement under the guise of national security interests" that occurred after 9/11. She explains that "North Carolina's embrace of restrictive immigration enforcement has occurred alongside a national and southern trend toward punitive policies on both the state and local levels." She maintains that "restrictive immigration policy and political rhetoric by the close of the 2000s can also be linked to the failure of Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2007." She points out that as of April 2011 various measures that would have punitive effects for immigrants "were pending before the North Carolina General Assembly." After discussing "several practical and legal problems with how 287(g) and Secure Communities are implemented," Griesbach concludes her article with "some preliminary policy possibilities related to identification [documents] and the use of ICE detainees."

De Ann Pendry's article provides an account of how immigration policies and politics have evolved in Tennessee over the past decade. In the spring of 2001, a few months before 9/11, a grassroots campaign had "successfully convinced the state legislature to pass a law that enabled all residents of the state to obtain a driver's license, regardless of immigration status." Since then, however, an "anti-immigrant backlash" has been gathering strength. As of 2008, only persons with a valid social security number could obtain a driver's license. "In Tennessee, the number of proposals in the state legislature designed to place restrictions on undocumented immigrants or on all immigrants and place requirements on employers, police officers, state employees, and others increased from 20 in 2006 to 44 in 2007 to 66 in 2008." The author also describes the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition's (TIIRC) efforts to prevent such proposals from becoming law; they have had only very limited success.

It seems that in Tennessee, as elsewhere in the U.S., undocumented immigrants "serve as convenient scapegoats that help enable some politicians to avoid address-

ing deeper issues regarding the economic downturn, the restructuring of the U.S. economy that has been going on since the 1960s, and the dismantling of laws that protect workers." The author points out that "many Tennesseans...do not have much knowledge about current requirements for legal immigration, the net effects of our immigration policies over the last 30 years, or the long history of labor recruitment and legal restrictions applied to migrants, particularly those from Mexico." Hence, as Pendry concludes, there is an ongoing need for organizations like the TIRRC and their allies to counter what seems to have become a politically expedient negative discourse.

Charles Jaret and Orsolya Kolozsvari-Wright examine the citizenship and naturalization patterns of immigrants in the southeastern United States and discuss the possible political implications of the trends they observe. They point out that "when the U.S. federal government revises policies affecting immigrants ... or if it hints at revising policies ... political activity by immigrants increases ... and rates of naturalization usually rise." They cite numerous studies of the various types of factors that come into play in determining immigrants' propensity to naturalize but maintain that "up to now research on citizenship has not explored naturalization trends in different areas *within* the United States."

Their detailed statistical analysis is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS), which shows the citizenship status (naturalized U.S. citizen or non-U.S. citizen) of the foreign-born population residing in each state subdivided by entry year cohorts for people born in six different regions of the world. They found that "Georgia and the other southeastern states have relatively low rates of naturalization for most immigrant groups, except for Caribbean immigrants (especially in Georgia and South Carolina, where they are above average) and 'Other' immigrants." Such results were not surprising since "immigrants in the South tend to have entered the U.S. more recently than those in other regions, and since little or no tradition exists in this region of recruiting immigrants into, or mobilizing them for, political processes."

Nevertheless, in their article they have "suggested several ways that naturalized citizens and naturalization rates are affecting U.S. politics," and they underline "the potential political influence" that Asian immigrants might come to have since they tend to have high naturalization rates. They reach the conclusion that it is definitely useful to examine naturalization patterns in various parts of the country, since over time naturalized immigrants may have the capacity to alter the political landscape of the United States.

In his essay entitled "The Declaration of Independence and Immigration in the United States of America," Kenneth M. White makes an appeal for a "moderate"

and “balanced” or what he has also labeled as a “common sense” approach to immigration reform. He argues that “The current immigration debate fits within a historical pattern that pits an unrestricted right of immigration (the left) against exclusive, provincial politics (the right)” and finds justification for both of these positions within the Declaration of Independence. In White’s analysis, this document establishes a philosophical “paradigm of universal Natural Right for all human beings” and yet “also sets forth a political paradigm where Americans are ‘one people,’ which creates the anti-philosophic distinction of us vs. them.”

According to White, “the great genius of the Declaration of Independence is that it attempts to strike a balance between the conservative, political side and the philosophic, liberal side of human nature.” Furthermore, he believes that “it is possible to find common ground between liberals and conservatives on the issue of immigration.” Achieving this, however, will require a “balance between the two paradigms of politics and philosophy, not the conquest of one by the other.” His “proposed call for moderation between the extreme views on the left and right...regarding immigration requires an end to the political polarization that debilitates current policy debate in the United States.” “In short, people need to stop shouting about immigration and start deliberating based on the principles enshrined in America’s founding documents.” That is the essence of his “common sense proposal for immigration reform,” which could also well be applied to so many other areas of political debate in the U.S. today.

In her critical note about the current use and proposed expansion of E-Verify, Elizabeth O’Connor expresses some serious concerns about the program’s efficacy and effects. A corporation hired by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to assess this program estimated “that E-Verify misses about 54 percent of unauthorized workers during its database scans.” As she explains, “This occurs largely because, while a database can detect if a document is flawed or inaccurate, it cannot determine if it belongs to the person who submitted the document.” The program may facilitate “discrimination” and “exploitative practices.” Furthermore, if E-Verify became mandatory nationwide, many employers would simply “begin to shift workers off the books,” leading to lost local, state, and federal tax revenues.

O’Connor’s central argument is that “fixing the immigration system must pair enforcement efforts with full, fair immigration reform.” She uses the example of the janitorial or cleaning industry to illustrate the limited and perverse impacts of an “enforcement-only approach to immigration.” As the author explains, besides being an industry that employs a large number and high proportion of immigrants, “the cleaning industry is also an area where large ‘formal,’ law-abiding employers com-

pete with off-the-books, fly-by-night employers." "I-9 audits and E-Verify are not affecting cleaning contractors with workers off the books. Instead, the result has been to steer janitors into an underground economy and to reduce the number of legal, family-supporting, tax-paying jobs in the industry." She concludes that in the cleaning industry, as in many others, the current enforcement-only measures have "simply led to a growing work force operating outside the legal and tax systems, which is bad for both immigrants and the U.S. economy."

Another critical note by Josema de Miguel León describes the ordeals that undocumented Central American migrants go through as they cross Mexico's southern border on their way to the United States. Her report covers their journey from Tecun Uman in Guatemala, where they cross the Suchiate River, to the town of Arriaga in Chiapas, Mexico, where they climb aboard a freight train, commonly referred to as "*La bestia*" (the Beast), bound for the Mexico-U.S. border. It is a harrowing, nightmarish experience for all, which discourages some, who after being assaulted, raped, robbed, or even mutilated when falling from the train, choose to return to their home countries or remain in Mexico, and yet moves most others to persist all the more, sometimes making several attempts, until they finally reach "el Norte." The author's vivid, poignant descriptions speak for themselves, and one can only wonder what kinds of hardships these people must be experiencing every day in their homelands for them to be willing to undergo such risks and suffering on their journey to an uncertain future in the U.S.

Rebecca LeFebvre's bibliographical note discusses two edited volumes that present specific examples and case studies of the recent Latino immigrant influx to the Southeast and analyze the impact that "this population transformation [is] having on the attitudes, culture, and institutions in the U.S. South." The various articles presented in each volume will help readers understand and "sort through the trends, countertrends, and misperceptions surrounding the controversial issue of immigration" in general, and in particular how these elements play out in the specific context of the southeastern states. LeFebvre detected four main themes or "similar patterns of social transformation" common to each volume: "shifting of the historic black-white racial line, racialization of the Latino identity, conflation of Latino immigrants and unauthorized immigrants, and the uncommon example of accommodation."

She also perceived some differences with respect to the various authors' interpretations and expectations of how immigrant communities and race relations within the region might evolve over the next several years. However, as she points out, "the future of immigrant communities in the South is not a question of whether the Latinos will be a significant part of the population, but rather how Latinos will be incorporated into the population." In her opinion both books "are essential reading

for anyone studying social, political, or economic implications of the current wave of Latino immigration" in this new destination region.

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