

Book Review on Latino Immigration To the U.S. South

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The size of the Latino immigrant population in the U.S. South over the last two decades has increased at an impressive rate. The number of Latino immigrants increased by 200 to 400 percent in most southeastern states from 1990 to 2006, compared to the national average of 50 percent. Various factors have driven this growth, including pull-driven recruitment by employers in the region, push-driven aspects of slowing economies in Latin America, and policy-driven changes such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. What impact is this population transformation having on the attitudes, culture, and institutions in the U.S. South? The two books reviewed here tackle this question in a thorough, fascinating manner. Both are edited collections of multidisciplinary essays focusing on change in the “new” immigration states in the South as seen through specific case studies across 10 states. The books complement each other on the various perspectives they bring to the understanding of racial dynamics between Latino immigrants and native southerners. The books’ similarities in discussing immigrant assimilation and racialization lead the reader to a consistent view of the current challenges facing southern society, while their differences in emphasis may lead to diverging predictions of the future of race relations in the region.

The key question addressed by Odem and Lacy throughout their book, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, is how the new wave of Latino immigrants is transforming the unique nature of the U.S. South as a region. The South stands out from the rest of the U.S. as more politically conservative and evangelical Protestant, with more poverty than the rest of the nation and a history of racial segregation. The South was not originally a main immigrant destination because it

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did not experience the same rapid industrialization as other parts of the country. Since the 1980s, economic globalization began generating investment there, and a shortage of low-cost labor ensued. The policies brought about by IRCA opened up the possibilities for immigrant movement in the late 1980s and the wave of immigration into the South began. The impact of this is investigated in the book by way of five main themes: transnationalism, economic impact, community building, racial dynamics, and southern responses.

The key question addressed in Lippard and Gallagher's *Being Brown in Dixie: Race, Ethnicity, and Latino Immigration in the New South* is how race matters in southern society, particularly with regard to the Latino immigrant population. The wave of Latino immigration over the last two decades differs from previous flows into the country in three ways. First, today's Latino immigrant issues are intertwined with race relations. Second, the number of unauthorized immigrants is higher. And third, today's immigrants have "brown" skin color, as opposed to the "white" immigrants who previously came from Europe. As these immigrants flow into a region with a history of strained racial relations, the shifting nature of race and ethnic understanding needs to be fully explored. This book explores the topic through three themes: re-conceptualization of race and ethnicity in the South, changes in social institutions, and immigrant incorporation into labor and politics.

To a large degree, both books are on a common path toward understanding Latino immigrant incorporation into the culture of the South. The books have similar messages in four main areas. First, the introduction of a large-scale population of Latino immigrants has changed the racial binary of black and white that has dominated the U.S. South for decades. Odem and Lacy point out that many believe the distinctiveness of the South is rooted in its history of slavery, entrenchment of white supremacy, and civil rights movements. The introduction of foreign-born population has confused the racial lines that have been used to define social relations as well as social issues in the region. Several chapters in their book explore the new racial lines being drawn between Latinos and blacks, particularly with regard to competition for low-wage jobs.

One specific example of the changing racial lines is a study about Mississippi's poultry-processing industry, found in Chapter 6, entitled "Race, Migration, and Labor Control: Neoliberal Challenges to Organizing Mississippi's Poultry Workers," by Angela C. Stuesse. Increased demand for

chicken in the U.S. created growth in the industry and an increased demand for low-cost labor. Latinos grew from 9 percent of the poultry-processing work force to 29 percent in just 20 years. Through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups, Stuesse was able to show how the differing perspectives of each racial group created obstacles for collaboration and positive change. The blacks tended to view the Latinos as hard workers, but too docile and unwilling to stand up to unreasonable demands from management. The Latinos tended to view the blacks as lazy, and were generally unaware of the oppressive history of blacks in the region. Corporate management was able to take advantage of these differing racial views and exploit low-cost labor. Management was viewed as purposely encouraging the division between the black and Latino workers in order to prevent increased union power.

The growing hostility between blacks and Latinos in the South is discussed frequently in Lippard and Gallagher's book. In chapter 2, entitled "The Shifting Nature of Racism," by Regine O. Jackson, the term "horizontal racism" was emphasized as essential vocabulary in contemporary discourse on racial relations. Horizontal racism refers to the discrimination among minority groups, often replacing the "vertical racism" demonstrated by the oppression of a minority by a dominant group. The low-wage-job competition made the black population more vulnerable as they were displaced by the new Latino immigrant work force. At the same time, blacks were more powerful than the Latino population because of gains they had made during the Civil Rights Movement putting them in a stronger political position. Tension between blacks and Latinos was brought out in the chapter "Racializing Hiring Practices for Dirty Jobs," by Cameron D. Lippard. Lippard's case study of hiring practices in Atlanta's construction industry demonstrated how race had indeed become a generalized proxy for hiring. Construction management considered Latino immigrants "the bargain of the century": in its view, they made for a high quality work force and were perceived as loyal, docile, hard-working, and low-cost. Other potential workers, including blacks, whites, and Americanized Latinos, were all put into the category of "lazy Americans." This drove the broader concern of Latino immigrants taking jobs away from native-born Americans, particularly displacing traditionally black workers in the growing Southern industries such as construction, poultry-processing, and carpet manufacturing.

The second common message found in both books was that Latino immigrants' racialized identity is a hindrance to social mobility in the home,

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school, and community. Lippard and Gallagher explored the process whereby Latino immigrants are "racialized" in the U.S. South. As a new group entering the U.S. with an uncertain classification, Latino immigrants tend to be defined by native U.S. culture in a way that secures existing privilege and entitlement for the dominant white population. This process plays out in a way that creates obstacles in basic social institutions such as housing, education, and community space. One case study was described in chapter 7, "Unfair Housing Practices in Black and Brown," by Stephen J. Sills and Elizabeth Blake. Sills and Blake studied the Latino housing situation in North Carolina, uncovering frequent discrimination against Latinos, despite the existence of fair housing laws. Latinos were shown to experience greater housing discrimination in the region than either blacks or whites. Another social obstacle was described in chapter 8 of the book, entitled "The Public Schools' Response to the Immigration Boom," by Andrew Wainer. The author explored the impact of a growing Latino immigrant population on the public education system in case sites in Georgia, Arkansas, and North Carolina. His study found four major barriers to immigrant education including parental involvement, teacher training, immigrant status, and discrimination. Without needed policy improvements, the educational barriers could lead to stratification of the southern population along racial lines leaving Latinos as a permanent laboring class.

Odem and Lacy contributed to the racialized identity message with a study of community space in Atlanta, Georgia, in chapter 7, "Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Space in Atlanta," by Mary E. Odem. Odem's study showed how Latino immigrants were excluded from various public spaces. Some city councils in the metro-Atlanta area created ordinances to prevent gathering on street corners, a common practice of Latino day laborers looking for work. Unauthorized immigrants are not allowed to get driver's licenses in the state of Georgia, limiting their access to roads. Even the local Catholic Church prohibited separate church gathering spaces for Latinos and insisted that they assimilate into existing churches, even if they were hard to get to by public transportation. By putting restrictions on the movements and gathering places of Latino immigrants, communities have hindered their ability to adjust and sustain a social life in their new environment. These various studies in the two books demonstrate the restricted mobility in the home, school, and community for Latino immigrants who have been given a "racialized" identity by their host communities.

The third trend the two books highlighted was the idea of the conflation of Latino immigrants with unauthorized immigrants and related misperceptions. In their summary chapter entitled “Popular Attitudes and Public Policies: Southern Responses to Latino Immigration,” Odem and Lacy assert that some policies seeking to exclude unauthorized immigrants also impact authorized immigrants. One example is the declaration of English-only laws. Twenty-nine states have made English their official language, and all of the southeastern states are included in the 29, creating an obstacle to immigrant assimilation. Hostility and anti-immigrant attitudes increase due to the perception of unauthorized immigrants. Public misperceptions of unauthorized immigrants include the notion that they do not pay taxes, they use state welfare, and they increase crime rates, none of which is supported by the evidence.

Lippard and Gallagher revealed a pattern of conflation of unauthorized immigrants and the Latino population in a compelling content analysis of the Southeast’s most widely circulated news publication, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC). The analysis was entitled “The Myth of Millions: Socially Constructing Illegal Immigration” by Stephanie Bohon and Heather Macpherson Parrott. The authors of this study theorized that the problem of unauthorized immigration to Georgia was socially constructed and not a true cause of any of the state’s social difficulties. Their analysis showed that the AJC consistently over-reported the number of unauthorized immigrants in the state without citing any source for that number. Content analysis revealed four main patterns of AJC reporting on unauthorized immigration: 1) confusing reporting on the estimate of unauthorized immigrants in the state; 2) stories about Latinos almost always referred to illegal immigrants and vice versa, creating a picture that Latinos and illegal immigrants are the same; 3) stories consistently used the term “illegals” or “illegal immigrants” as opposed to “unauthorized”; 4) stories unquestioningly quoted those who claimed illegal immigration was an issue without verifying claims. The trend of conflating the Latino group with the unauthorized immigrant group can have negative effects on all Latinos, bringing them under suspicion simply due to their ethnicity. The media’s impact in this area was shown in a letter to the editor of the AJC where a reader did in fact consider that any Latino she saw was illegal.

Finally, the fourth common theme was one of accommodation and cooperation between Latino immigrants and their host communities in the South. Both books exemplified this theme with a study on the com-

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munity of Dalton, Georgia. The Dalton immigrant story may be more of an exception than a rule, but it is significant as an example of successful social change. Known as the “carpet capital of the world,” the city of Dalton experienced a tremendous inflow of Latino immigrants to meet the growing local demand for labor in the flooring industry. The Latino population of Dalton grew from 6.5 percent in 1990 to over 40 percent by the year 2000. Due to the positive response of local political, civic, and business leaders, Latino immigrants were incorporated into the community with more tolerance than other cities in the region. Dalton did experience resistance from native residents, particularly to the unauthorized immigrant presence, but extreme anti-immigrant attitudes were not present as they were in other cities, such as Gainesville. The study in Lippard and Gallagher’s book was entitled “Success Stories: Proactive Community Responses to Immigration,” by William E. Baker and Paul A. Harris, two professors from universities in the U.S. South. The study in Odem and Lacy’s book was called “The Dalton Story: Mexican Immigration and Social Transformation in the Carpet Capital of the World,” by Víctor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, two professors from universities outside the region, one in Mexico and the other in California. The two studies gave a complementary and balanced view of the Dalton story. The former attributed Dalton’s success largely to a balanced two-pronged approach including both the enforcement of immigration laws and responsiveness to immigrants’ social needs. The latter attributed Dalton’s success to the local employers who were closely linked with governance of the area. Both studies applauded the efforts of the Georgia Project, a local non-profit organization established to address the bilingual education needs of immigrant children and their families, including a teacher exchange program between the public schools of Dalton and a university in Mexico.

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These two books significantly advance our understanding of the Latino immigrant impact on the U.S. South, finding four similar patterns of social transformation: 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. Where these books differ is in their projection into the future of immigrant transformation of the South, particularly in two areas: immigrant communities and race relations.

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. Odem and Lacy focus on the transnational aspect of immigrant communities. Many of the immigrants in their studies indicated a desire to return to their countries of origin or live in transnational space, with ties to their host community as well as their home countries. Linkages between an immigrant's two cultural homes take the form of remittances, frequent communication, travel, and bilingualism. The "sojourner mentality" discovered among Latin American immigrants points to a trend of cross-cultural citizenship that allows immigrants to develop a sense of belonging in two countries. Lippard and Gallagher, on the other hand, view Latino immigrants as here to stay, not as a presence living between cultures. The question is whether or how those immigrants will assimilate with the existing culture of the South. Will Americans and Latinos exist as two divided communities, or will the cultures eventually blend in some way? For Lippard and Gallagher, the answer lies in a blend that creates a hierarchy fully dependent on race and ethnicity. This leads to the second difference between the books: the future of race relations.

For Lippard and Gallagher, the future of race relations in the South involves the introduction of "brown" into the historical dichotomy of "black" and "white" in a way that continues to raise issues of racism that drive toward white dominance. The racial hierarchy is anticipated to evolve into categories of "black" and "non-black," with Latinos trying to find their place in that hierarchy. Some of the chapters of their book showed how Latinos have attempted to distance themselves from blacks and to associate more with whites. However, Lippard and Gallagher do not envision Latinos becoming part of the "non-black" category. They do envision a racial pecking order that will rely on three factors: race (skin color), ethnicity (Americanization), and nativity (immigrant versus citizen), with skin color as the dominant factor in determining racial privilege. Alternatively, Odem and Lacy assert that after two decades of Latino immigration to the U.S. South, it is still too soon to draw conclusions about the future of race relations. Although they concur that racial relations in the South are being transformed by the new immigrant population, they contend that generalizations about the direction of changing racial relations cannot yet be made.

Both books promote continued study of the changing racial dynamics in the U.S. South, particularly with regard to policy making. The racial pecking order theorized by Lippard and Gallagher is an area that warrants

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more study. They suggest that Americans and their public institutions have socially constructed a rank for the Latino immigrant population, and that rank is unlikely to change in the short term. What effect have policies had in that social construction and how should future policies be formed? Lippard and Gallagher point out that communities cannot wait for federal involvement when it comes to issues around immigration. Communities should be proactive and create positive relations between native-born southerners and new immigrants.

Overall, these two books are essential reading for anyone studying the social, political, or economic implications of the current wave of Latino immigration into the U.S. South. They sort through the trends, countertrends, and misperceptions that surround the controversial issue of immigration. The themes of racial dynamics, racial identity, immigrant incorporation, and social transformation are explored through a variety of case studies in states across the region. The two books make different predictions for the future of immigrant communities and race relations in the South, but both make the point that communities cannot wait for federal government intervention. State and local governments and organizations need to address the future of their communities, which will most certainly be a multiracial one.

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