Latinas/os in the South: An Overview

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Introduction

The history of Latinas/os in the South is old and new—it simultaneously predates the founding of the United States and represents fairly contemporary migration patterns. On the one hand, Florida and Texas have some of the oldest Latina/o communities in the United States—both were Spanish colonies before they became US states. They also represent the Latina/o community's Black and Indigenous roots as well as their European and mixed ancestry. On the other hand, Latinas/os did not move in substantial numbers to other Southern states in the nineteenth or most of the twentieth centuries. Instead, their presence in states like Arkansas, North Carolina, and Georgia are, historically speaking, new phenomena. Deindustrialization in states like California and Texas pushed Latinas/os to look for jobs elsewhere while meatpacking and other industries in the South were trying to expand. These national migrants were joined by Latin American immigrants who were fleeing continued political and economic instabilities in their countries of origin. Together, these factors led to a dynamic growth of Latinas/os in the South in the last thirty years. This history also represents some of the ongoing tensions within Latina/o communities regionally and nationally.

Immigration, and the idea of foreigner and temporary labor migrant, has defined both Mexican immigrant and Mexican American identity and social formations and alliances.[1] Mexican Americans have been historically racialized as border-crossers and thus as outsiders and

[1] David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity, (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and "Sin Fronteras? Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968-1978," in *Between Two World: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. by David G. Gutiérrez, (Wilmington, DL: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1996), 175-209.

aliens to the nation-state. One key aspect to the racialization of Latinas/os, particularly Mexicans, is the discursive and legal power of illegality: the category of "illegal alien" has served as a means to racialize all Mexicans in particular ways. Furthermore, illegality is primarily a political identity, because it is a juridical status that necessitates a social relation to the state. In this way, illegality is similar to citizenship, as both are political identities formed through juridical status. But whereas the latter defines inclusion, the former defines exclusion and the erasure of legal personhood.[2] This idea that Mexicans are "illegal aliens" has, by extension, also been used to define or racialize other Latinas/os. They in turn try to reify their longstanding presence in the United States or to emphasize their legal status, thus distancing themselves from others in the community.

The remainder of this paper offers a historical overview of some factors that have helped to define the experiences of Latinas/os in the United States over the last three centuries. I begin with a discussion of citizenship and the related issue of how Latinas/os have negotiated the colorline in the nineteenth century. Then I move to the twentieth century and offer an analysis of some of the larger social and economic issues that defined the country and region and discuss the diversification of the Latina/o community. In the penultimate section I offer a close analysis of the economic and political factors that led to the dynamic growth of Latina/o Southerners in recent decades. I close the paper by calling attention to the importance of the Latina/o South with regards to national issues about equality and voting power.

Latina/o Citizenship and the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

In 1819, Spain ceded Florida to the United States and it remained a territory until 1845 when it became the 27th state. In 1836, Texas declared its independence from Mexico and, in

[2] Nicholas De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419-447.

1845, entered the Union as the 28th state. A dispute about Texas's boundary led to the U.S.-Mexican War that lasted less than two years but cost Mexico nearly half of its territory. The U.S.-Mexican War ended in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which granted Mexicans U.S. citizenship at a time when national laws dictated that only white people could be citizens. Mexican Americans were granted citizenship twenty years prior to African Americans who obtained it in 1868 with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. As conquered people, Mexican Americans were exterior to the nation. Thus, despite citizenship and supposed incorporation, they were seen as foreigners by Anglos who often refused to consider them white or American.[3]

Citizenship did not protect Mexican Americans from segregation, and while some fought against it on racially progressive grounds others argued it should not have been applied to them. Despite being legally recognized as U.S. citizens and therefore white, Mexican Americans were rarely accepted as either while their mixed racial and ethnic background (European, indigenous, African, and Asian) complicated the group's everyday life. In the segregated U.S. South, they were frequently forced to use separate facilities or send children to segregated schools; like African Americans, they fought for their equality and against segregation. Sometimes Latinas/os fought against their segregation by arguing that they were indeed white and should be recognized as such. Latinas/os who looked more European could sometimes pass as white and some of them chose to live as white in order to skirt discrimination and second-class citizenship. That strategy, however, marginalized Latinas/os and other groups who appeared to be, or were, in fact, indigenous, African, Asian, or mixed. Walking in between the colorline ultimately meant that

[3]Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Mexican American inclusion came by buying into African American exclusion. [4] In this way, Latinas/os contributed to the oppression of other communities of color.

In Texas, the dynamics between Mexican Americans, African Americans, and white people played out in different ways across the state and reflected particular political economies of time and place. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, central Texas was a cotton-growing region where various class societies came into being and where the land-tenure system helped to define racial categories and parameters. After the United States annexed Texas, white people's racialized ideas about Indians, African Americans, and Mexican Americans affected public policies, especially as they were connected to land and labor. In this multiracial landscape, poor white sharecroppers were marked as racially inferior; as a "white scourge," or sub-par white people who degraded whiteness, while Mexican Americans were cast as a group "in-between" Black people and white people.[5] The local setting—the demographics and the type of economic structure—helped to define how much race mattered in particular places and the ways groups were treated based on the meanings of race in different regions.

Mexicans immigrated to Texas, sometimes joining Mexican Americans who migrated deeper into the region in search of better opportunities. Between the 1910s and the 1930s Mexicans and Mexican Americans engaged in further circular migrations heading to Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Mississippi to mine aluminum, work in lumber, load coal, or pick cotton. These Latina/o workers would work a few months in Southern destinations, return home to Texas or Mexico, and make a similar journey the following year. A few enterprising

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[4] Neil Foley, "Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness" in *Reflexiones: New Directions in Mexican American Studies*, edited by Neil Foley. (Austin, Texas: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1997): 53-70; Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* Rev.ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[5] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of South Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

individuals stayed year-round, settling permanently in the Deep South in an effort to improve their economic and social standing.[6] Often their migration meant they were entering places that had been largely defined through the Black/white binary but which were more removed from the acquisition of Mexican lands.

As had been true in Texas, place became an important factor in determining Mexican and Mexican American social and racial positions in the different Southern states as well as links to the labor sphere and class standing. For example, middle-class Mexicans in 1920s New Orleans proved able to achieve a racial and social standing akin to the status of Europeans and thus successfully cast themselves as white people. In contrast, poor Mexicans and Mexican American migrant workers in Mississippi and Arkansas endured segregation even as they argued that they were white. In Arkansas, Mexican workers attempted to secure their standing by appealing to the Mexican government to argue with U.S. officials on their behalf. This process was facilitated by the Bracero Program that operated between 1942 and 1964, a binational agreement between the United States and Mexico that brought guest workers or "braceros" from Mexico to work in a variety of sites throughout the United States during a labor shortage caused by World War II.[7] In the mid-twentieth century in the Arkansas Delta, braceros and their consular representatives leveraged their position as necessary laborers. They successfully lobbied to have local officials provide Mexican workers with access to white spaces, such as movie theaters and schools.[8] Despite these earlier migrations from Texas and Florida to other parts of the South, the Latina/o community did not grow much in the earlier part of the twentieth century; instead, the dynamic

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[6] Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
[7] Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
[8] Weise, *Corazón de Dixie*.

growth of Latinas/os in the region is a more contemporary phenomenon that is linked with other national issues.

The Sunbelt and the Twentieth Century

The South has been reinventing itself since the end of Reconstruction with the aid of the North, the federal government, and business leaders and entrepreneurs from both regions. Post-Reconstruction advocates argued that the Old South was gone, as exemplified by the elimination of racial slavery, and in its place had emerged a region and people ready to embrace industrialization. Since that era, the push to modernize the region has led to a multitude of efforts to "develop" capital and labor in its cities, counties, and states. Since the 1930s, the South has been marketed to a variety of business interests while its industrial development reflects local, state, national, and global forces that have exacerbated the region's problems. Prospective investors found the South attractive because it was friendly to business, offering low wages, low taxes, and an antiunion climate. Investments in infrastructure like schools and roads, however, were limited. By the mid-1950s, industrial recruiters had become reluctant advocates of integration as reports suggested that businesses would not go to the South due to the racial turmoil.[9] Nevertheless, their advocacy was superficial, aimed at improving the region's appalling image rather than investing in the area's poor Black and white people.

By the 1970s the North's economy was in decline, and local boosters were pushing the South's virtues--cheap, nonunion labor, low taxes, low cost of living, and a relaxed lifestyle. The Sunbelt South was built on these conditions.[10] The boom was the result of seemingly

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[9] Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945–1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

[10] James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936–1990*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

contradictory influences: an influx of relatively affluent consumers, high birth rates, increased federal spending, and traditional development policies (cost advantages and tax breaks). James Cobb concludes: "Reduced to its essentials, the so-called good business climate of which southern politicians remained so protective in the 1990s still bore a striking resemblance to the planter-industrial policy rapprochement of the 1880s."[11]

The so-called Second Reconstruction, a period in the mid-twentieth century during the long civil rights era, emerged from the federal government's intervention in US southern society as Washington attempted to get the region to accept national changes around issues of equality for African Americans.[12] Many of the transformations resulted from legal challenges taken to courts or mandated through federal legislation, including the landmark school desegregation decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Despite violent and brutal episodes and massive resistance, change once again came to the region.[13] Many of the white people who could afford it moved away from the urban centers to the suburbs to maintain their way of life, their segregated lifestyle.[14]

To white people, especially in the working class, the change came at the cost of their standing, because during slavery and segregation whiteness was a kind of "wage," a benefit that provided certain kinds of privileges and entitlements. In the ensuing decades various politicians tapped into white rage and resentment. Dan Carter points to George Wallace as the first

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[11] Cobb, *The selling of the South*, 280.
[12] Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*, 3rd ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007); Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[13] Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006); Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973).
[14] Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

politician to exploit "white backlash" as a means to further his political career. In doing so, Wallace set the precedent for a "politics of rage" that has been central to the rise of the Republican Party. Carter posits that by 1972 the GOP was solidly identified with conservative American values. Subsequent politicians like Nixon and Reagan used such a values system to mobilize a base of supporters against the liberal Democratic Party, which they argued was out of touch with traditional values as it supported African Americans, gay people, and (lazy) welfare recipients.[15]

Latina/o Diversity in the Twentieth Century

Latinas/os' history in the U.S. South in the mid-twentieth century reflected a diversification of ethnic backgrounds and national origins and proved even more multifaceted and varied. Latina/o histories from the 1950s to the 1980s reflect broad international issues including the Cuban Revolution, violence in Colombia, and civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, all of which had been influenced by U.S. foreign policies and interventions. The case of Cubans in the mid-twentieth century stands in contrast to many other groups because Cubans were granted entrance to the U.S. nation-state during a strong economic period and when there was still fervent anti-Communist sentiment.

The first two cohorts of Cubans who left the island consisted of upper-class and middle-class people: professionals, business owners, managers, and skilled workers who were overwhelmingly white. The first to leave did so soon after Fidel Castro took power or immediately after he nationalized industry (1960–1964). Many of them were able to transfer their savings to the United States, while others were rehired by the US companies that had employed them in Cuba. When the second cohort (1965– 1974) arrived, many of its small

[15] Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gringrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University press, 1996).

merchants and skilled or semiskilled workers were hired by Cuban-born business owners. However, social class distinctions from the island were transferred to the United States; for example, those who had belonged to the five most exclusive yacht and country clubs in Havana founded a club in Miami and nicknamed it "The Big Five."[16] These first two cohorts identified as exiles—not immigrants—who came to the United States to wait for Castro's eventual defeat. Many went to Miami, Florida but others settled in Atlanta and New Orleans. As the years progressed it seemed unlikely they would be able to return to Cuba as quickly as they once believed. Nevertheless, their wealth served them well in the United States and they established businesses that altered the economic landscape of places like Miami.[17] Cuban diversity, like other Latina/o groups, also breaks down along class lines and those of race and ethnicity. For example, in 1980 when Castro announced he was opening the port of Mariel, Cuban exiles initially embraced their compatriots. But when the press began reporting that they were social deviants, many Cuban Americans distanced themselves, fearing the new cohort would tarnish the reputation of Cubans in the United States as "golden exiles." Unlike their predecessors, this group of Cubans was working class and less white; close to 71 percent were blue-collar workers, and Blacks or Mulattos made up more than 20 percent of the new arrivals. Cubans from Mariel were also the first Cubans subjected to detention in refugee processing camps as the United States screened them for diseases, criminal backgrounds, and as possible communist agents. In the end, fewer than 2 percent of them were judged serious criminals and denied asylum.[18]

The processing of Cubans from the boatlift was quite different than the kind of

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[16] Maria de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Felix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959–1995* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).
[17] Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).
[18] Gastón A. Fernández, "Race, Gender, and Class in the Persistence of the Mariel Stigma Twenty Years after the Exodus from Cuba," *International Migration Review* 41, no. 3 (2007): 602-622; Silvia Pedraza, "Los Marielitos of 1980: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality," *Cuba in Transition* 14 (2004): 89-102.

welcoming reception the first two cohorts of Cubans received but also stands in sharp contrast to the treatment of Haitians in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this time hundreds of Haitians arrived on U.S. shores and applied for asylum only to be denied. In 1980 Jesse Jackson, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Senator Edward Kennedy among others fought to ensure that Haitians received the same treatment as Cubans. In response, President Jimmy Carter formed the Cuban-Haitian Task Force, which promised equal treatment for both groups. However, the victory was short-lived with the election of Ronald Reagan; his administration did not treat Cubans and Haitians as equals and quickly implemented a harsh policy toward the latter group by interdicting their boats.[19] Reagan also carried Cuban Americans in the presidential election, making them a valuable constituency. Those relationships were strengthened by his own anti-Communist stance about the "'pariah' of the Western Hemisphere" (Cuba). Fueled by these ideological sympathies, Reagan authorized his attorney general to adjust Cubans' status to permanent residents with a path to citizenship based on provisions in the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966.[20] Haitians, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans, to name a few, never received the kind of "open door" policy granted to the Cubans, even though they too fled violent dictatorships and civil wars; instead if they fled to the United States, they entered as undocumented immigrants and were forced to deal with the immense limitations that status created. In this regard, the trajectories of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans in the United States strongly mirror those of Mexican immigrants.

In the 1990s, the South's Latina/o population grew rapidly through a variety of "push" and "pull" factors. First, Southern regional economic reorganization created jobs in low-skilled

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[19] Alex Stepick, *Pride against Prejudice: Haitians in the United States* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998).
[20] David Engstrom, *Presidential Decision Making Adrift: The Carter Administration and the Mariel Boatlift* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

and low-wage industries such as meat processing (especially of poultry), manufacturing, and construction. Companies also relocated to the South in search of more favorable business climates including lower worker wages. As a result, rural areas industrialized, changing the local economic milieu with companies that needed employees to fill their work sites. Second, an economic recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s hit California and other Western and Southwestern states particularly hard, causing many Latinas/os to lose their jobs and look elsewhere for employment opportunities, including in the South.

Third, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) provided more than two million immigrants with a path to legalization. It allowed undocumented immigrants who met strict criteria and passed a background check to become U.S. permanent residents. Many eventually became naturalized citizens. This change in legal status provided them with opportunities to look for better employment opportunities outside of their initial areas of settlement, such as California, Texas, and Illinois. Fourth, the social networks immigrants formed were crucial in facilitating the migration and immigration of Latinas/os to the South. Many immigrants learned about available jobs in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Georgia through informal social networks. In other instances, prospective employers sent recruiters to Texas, California, and Mexico to encourage people to resettle in the region. Upon reaching the South migrants frequently communicated with friends and family in other areas of the United States, or in their countries of origin in Latin America, to encourage them to move to the South as well. For some Latinas/os this constituted a second- or third-step in a migratory journey that started in Mexico, El Salvador, or Guatemala that then took them to California or Texas, traditional states of immigrant settlement, and ultimately to the southern United States.[21] After a few years,

[21] Rubén Hernández-León and Víctor Zúñiga, "Making Carpet by the Mile: The Emergence of a Mexican Immigrant Community in an Industrial Region of the U.S. Historic South," *Social Science Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2000): 49-66;

however, some new immigrants headed directly to the South to meet friends or family members who had already settled in places like Georgia, Tennessee, or North Carolina, bypassing California and Texas.

Together, these factors—economic decline in the West, Midwest, and East, immigrant social networks, and labor recruitment—led to the rapid growth of the Latina/o population in the U.S. South. In the 1990s, North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama experienced dynamic Latina/o growth, ranging from North Carolina's 400 percent increase to Alabama's 200 percent increase.[22] These trends continued into the early twenty-first century. Nine of the "10 Fastest Growing Hispanic States" in the country were in the South; in descending order they were Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, North Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland, and Georgia.[23] Despite such growth, Latinas/os in these states constituted less than 9 percent of each state's population, a number far below the 16 percent national average. By 2010, the Latina/o population in the South had increased by 57 percent, outpacing their growth in other regions, and 27% of all U.S. Latinas/os, 13.7 million people, lived in Texas and Florida alone.[24]

The local histories of two southern communities in Georgia and North Carolina offer distinct settings that allow us to understand Latinas/os experiences in the South at the end of the

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Douglass Massey, ed., *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008); Daniel D. Arreola, ed., *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: A Geography of Regional and Cultural Diversity*(Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

[22] Rakesh Kochar, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya, "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth," Pew Hispanic Center Report, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center Project, 2005) <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/07/26/the-new-latino-south/>

[23] Table 1: Growth in Hispanic Population among 10 Fastest Growing Hispanic States, 2000-2011 in "Mapping the Latino Population, By State, County and City," Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends, August 29, 2013, accessed January 28, 2016, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/08/29/mapping-the-latino-population-by-state-county-and-city/>

[24] U.S. Census Bureau News Releases, "2010 Census Shows Nation's Hispanic Population Grew Four Times Faster Than Total U.S. Population," U.S. Census Bureau, May 26, 2011, Accessed January 28, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn146.html>

twentieth century. They reveal how issues of race, labor, and the colorline played out in different kinds of places throughout the region and how larger patterns took somewhat different forms in different settings.

The Poultry Industry and Latinas/os in Two Sites

Although some migrants did work in construction and agriculture, the poultry industry was primarily responsible for drawing Latinas/os to the South. The South became a principal region for poultry production only in the late twentieth century, and Latinas/os initially had not been a significant percentage of its workforce. The demographic shifts that changed the South, as well as the industry's eventual reliance on an immigrant, mainly Latina/o workforce, were facilitated by globalization and its effects, a trend with roots going back to the 1940s. The industry had begun in the Northeast, and during World War II the federal government encouraged Americans to be patriotic by eating more chicken so soldiers could eat red meat. Demand for poultry production drove new poultry production in the South as the original Northeast producers could not keep up with demand. Nonetheless, the industry struggled to make substantial profits until it developed "value-added" poultry products like breaded tenders and boneless, skinless pieces of meat. The industry also sought to increase its profits through vertical integration that resulted in concentrating production in the South, where processing plants, feed mills, chicken farms, and laborers could be in close proximity and cut down on costs. Additionally, the region offered two incentives: historically low wages and anti-labor sentiments. These changes led to the deskilling of labor with an increase in production line speed and repetitive motion that make working conditions quite difficult.[25]

Migrant Latinas/os sometimes worked in poultry plants, but through the late 1980s they

[25] Human Rights Watch, *Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in US Meat and Poultry Plants,* (2004).

were not a significant percentage of the workforce, entering the industry only when agricultural work slowed down or when there was a poor harvest. As the South increased poultry processing, other sectors such as technology, aeronautics, manufacturing, construction, and service also boomed. These shifts created opportunities for some Southerners, especially white men who often relocated from rural to urban areas, while less profitable work often fell to working-class and working-poor laborers, often Black people, who were willing to do strenuous jobs. The rising poultry industry offered some of these jobs and produced a dramatic demographic shift in the industry's workforce. Nationally, from 1980 to 2000, the white workforce in the poultry industry dropped from nearly 70 percent of the total to just over 30 percent, while Black workers increased from 30 to 50 percent and Latina/o laborers from 1 to 17 percent. During the same period, the number of workers in the industry more than doubled.[26]

By the 1990s, Latinas/os migrated in significant numbers to the South to work in poultry plants, and the industry discovered a variety of benefits in hiring Latinas/os, especially undocumented people, who were eager to work, did not complain about working conditions, and rarely filed worker's compensation claims. Studies have traced the connections between the South's history of racial inequality and the industry's eternal search to drive down costs and increase its profits as well as expose how the industry has increasingly exploited workers in a variety of ways from denying bathroom breaks to threatening deportation.[27] The link between poultry processing and Latinas/os becomes more evident when we consider that "rapid Hispanic

[26] William Kandel and Emilio Parrado, "Hispanics in the American South and the Transformation of the Poultry Industry," in *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America*, ed. Daniel D. Arreola (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 265.
[27] Vanesa Ribas, *On the Line: Slaughterhouse Lives and the Making of the New South* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Angela Stuesse, *Scratching Out a Living: Latinos, Race, and Work in the Deep* South (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

growth counties correspond[ed] to high-poultry production counties."[28] By 2005 Latinas/os constituted a major percentage of the industry's workforce.[29] Elsewhere in the South, poultry work was still important though not initially the primary place of employment.

One of the first locales that experienced dynamic Latina/o growth was Dalton, Georgia—the carpet capital of the world. In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of Latinas/os moved to this are at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They worked in the carpet industry, which had been the city's economic base, but also in the area's growing poultry processing plants. According to the 1990 Census, the county where Dalton is had more than 72,000 people and Dalton had less than 22,000, making both relatively small places. The county's roughly 2,300 Latinas/os represented 3 percent of the population (of them, nearly 88 percent were from Mexico) and African Americans constituted 4 percent of the county. This pattern changed dramatically in the next few years. By 1997, one estimate put the county's Latina/o community at more than 45,000, and between 1990 and 1999 the number of Latina/o children in the Dalton public schools rose from 150 to nearly 2000.[30]

Dalton's Latina/o community also demonstrated the larger step-migration trend of moving to the South in the 1990s after having first lived in other parts of the United States. More than half of Dalton's Latinas/os surveyed had moved from California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois, with 12 other states also serving as a first settlement site. Most Latinas/os, largely Mexicans, moved to the city from these places after 1992, but as the years passed the majority of newly arrived Latinas/os came directly from Mexico. Dalton had become their primary

[28] William Kandel, "Meat-Processing Firms Attract Hispanic Workers to Rural America," United States Department of Agriculture, accessed January 10, 2014, http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2006-june/meat-processing-firms-attract-hispanic-workers-to-rural-america.aspx#.Uwvpa15RHVU.
[29] Human Rights Watch, "Blood, Sweat, and Fear."
[30] Hernández-León and Zúñiga, "Making Carpet by the Mile," 53, 56.

destination and a new immigrant hub.

During the 1990s, job opportunities in the carpet industry in Georgia grew by 24 percent and increased the demand for low-skill laborers. By 2000, Latinas/os constituted more than 17 percent of the industry's workforce, and by 2010 they were more than 25 percent. Latinas/os did not displace other racial or ethnic groups, and, instead, their presence was crucial to the growth of the carpet industry. In Dalton, Latinas/os remained concentrated in labor-intensive jobs as tufters, creelers, and extruders, jobs at the bottom of the carpet industry. [31] Elsewhere in the South, Latinas/os had a different experience given the local social and political context.

Latinas/os moved to North Carolina in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century to work in the textile, food processing, and poultry industries following the larger regional patterns of migration, immigration, and labor. However, local contexts greatly shaped their experiences and these could diverge even when counties were close to each other. Urban versus rural settings with their typically different population densities and political economies plus differences in the colorline that shaped how white and Black people interacted with each other proved crucial for establishing the frameworks and dynamics into which Latinas/os moved and navigated.

Two counties in rural eastern North Carolina recently studied by the sociologist Helen Marrow serve as an example of how different contexts and environments affect Latina/o communities. More specifically, local settings dramatically affect Latinas/os' mobility and their social, economic, and political involvement. "Bedford," the pseudonym Marrow employed for a majority-Black county that was part of the Black Belt, relied on the "old rural South" economy of tobacco, agriculture, and textiles that had declined since the 1970s. In 2000, Latinas/os represented only 3 percent of the county's population, while African Americans accounted for 58

[31] Rubén Hernández-León and Sarah Morando Lakhani, "Gender, Bilingualism, and the Early Occupational Careers of Second-Generation Mexicans in the South" *Social Forces* 92, no. 1 (2013): 65.

percent. In contrast, "Wilcox," a majority-white county that was part of the "new rural South," offered low-wage jobs in agribusiness and food processing, including poultry processing. As Wilcox boomed in the late 1990s and after 2000, Latinas/os came to make up 15 percent of the population, African Americans represented 29 percent, and white people made up most of the remaining population.

The counties' racial compositions and their economies were important because Latinas/os entered the labor sphere with other low-wage workers who were Black or white. Latinas/os sometimes perceived African Americans as being "jealous" of their socioeconomic advancement and thought these tensions extended beyond the labor arena into schools, neighborhoods, and politics. People Marrow interviewed for the study even reported self-segregation that broke down by race and ethnicity—Black with Black, white with white, and Latina/o with Latina/o. Some Latinas/os recognized that their anti-Black racism was something they brought from their countries of origin where they did not want to associate with Afro-Latin Americans.[32] At the same time, Latinas/os also perceived more social exclusion from African Americans versus more "friendly" receptions by white community members. The delicate relationship between Latinas/os and African Americans was also influenced by the political power that Black people had in each county, especially since some Latinas/os were undocumented and unable to vote. To a certain extent, if African Americans believed they had enough political power they supported more immigrant-friendly policies.

Marrow suggests that in rural eastern North Carolina, the colorline began to shift to Black/non-Black at the beginning of the twenty-first century as the presence of Latinas/os effectively marginalized African Americans as Latinas/os sought to claim social, economic, and

[32] Helen B. Marrow, *New Destination Dreaming: Immigration, Race, and Legal Status in the Rural American South* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

political power. Marrow notes that the specific rural setting was an important backdrop for that shift. In contrast, in a rural setting in Arkansas, Latinas/os, many of them Salvadoran, were forging a position for themselves as "better than white trash," a position made possible by the fact that they were in an area that had been overwhelmingly white for most of the twentieth century.[33] They cast themselves as hard workers and in opposition to so-called lazy white people who were content to do minimal work. In both instances Latinas/os attempted to claim social inclusion and positioned themselves as different than Black people or as the right kind of white people. In doing so they perpetuated the long-standing practice of gaining inclusion by marginalizing other ethnic or racial groups.

The Promise and Lost Opportunities of Latinas/os in the South

The issue of the colorline and how Latinas/os negotiate their position vis-à-vis other racial and ethnic groups continues to be an important issue regionally and nationally. Another important arena is their growing political power, or to be more accurate, what should be their growing voting power. In order to illustrate some of the issues around southern Latina/o voters, I am going to draw from an example in my own work on Latina/o Arkansans.

Latinas/os drove Arkansas's racial diversification in recent decades.[34] According to the 2000 census, there were positive Latina/o growth rates in every county, including those with net population losses. More than half of the Latina/o population lived in the Third Congressional District in the state's northwest corner. By 2010 the Latina/o population in Arkansas had reached almost 200,000 and constituted 6.4 percent of the state's population. The census also found that Latinas/os accounted for 41 percent of the overall population growth and made up 83 percent of

[33] Miranda Cady Hallett, "'Better than White Trash': Work Ethic, Latinidad and Whiteness in Rural Arkansas" *Latino Studies* 10, no. 1–2 (2012): 81–106.
[34] Perla M. Guerrero, *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

youths of color.[35] The Third Congressional District, however, was no longer defined as the northwest quadrant. Had the congressional lines from 1990 and 2000 remained in place, that district would have a significant Latina/o base; they might have even been a majority.

The possibility of having a majority-Latina/o district in a southern state that is not Florida or Texas is astounding and should be exciting for groups and foundations who want to register voters. Latina/o Southerners are disproportionally young; in 2014, there were 6.1 million under eighteen and 94 percent of them are citizens. This means that by 2032, 5.7 million of them will be eligible voters and they will double the currently Latina/o voting eligible population. [36] Yet, states like Arkansas, Mississippi, and others do not get the attention or resources necessary to mobilize and organize new voters since the focus is often on California, Texas, and Florida, more populous states where many more voters are needed to flip counties from Republican to Democrat or vice versa. Arturo Vargas, executive director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, expressed frustration in 2016 that funds went to swing states at the expense of Latina/o voters elsewhere. "We are not a three-state community. We are a 50-state community."[37] There should be no doubt that the Latina/o South will continue to grow and so should its political power.

The growth of the Latina/o South coincides with other trends. For example, people in their 20s and 30s are moving to Southern suburbs and, generally speaking, these generations tend to

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[35] Youths were defined as those under eighteen. "Univision Insights: Hispanics Show Double Digit Growth in Maryland, Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana and Vermont According to 2010 Census Data," press release, Univision Communications, Inc., February 11, 2011, http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110211006290/en/Univision-Insights-Hispanics-Show-Double-Digit-Growth.

[36] Allie Yee, "The Future of Young Latino Voters in the South," *The Institute for Southern Studies* (February 2016).

[37] Suzanne Gamboa, "NCLR Latino Voter Registration Money Fell from $7 Million to $1.5 Million," *NBC News*, September 9, 2016 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/nclr-latino-voter-registration-money-fell-7-million-1-5-n645181>. When I conducted research for my first book, *Nuevo South*, several Southern social justice organizations complained about their marginalization by "the coasts" with regards to immigrant rights and registering new voters.

be more racially and ethnically diverse and more liberal than the rest of the population.[38] "In Georgia, from the 2012 presidential election to the 2018 gubernatorial elections, the four counties constituting most of Atlanta and its suburbs—Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, and Gwinnett—increased their Democratic margin by more than 250,000."[39] This is remarkable considering President Donald Trump won Georgia by 170,000 votes. As the South continues to diversity, a lot of work remains to be done in creating alliances across race and ethnic lines with African American, Asian American, and Indigenous voters.

In recent decades, illegality took on place-specific resonance in the South as some states passed punitive anti-immigrant legislation.[40] In 2011, Alabama passed HB 56, the Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act. Inspired by Arizona's SB 1070, the Alabama legislation bars the transportation of undocumented immigrants and created felony charges for harboring an undocumented person, among other measures. Alabama lost no time enforcing their draconian law and, in at least one country, Alabama's Water Works posted a sign that customers without a state driver's license or identification would lose their service. This negation of a vital resource led some people to draw parallels to the South's Jim Crow past and name it "Juan Crow."[41] Latina/o Southerners themselves drew on this history to articulate their own identity in the region and drew inspiration from Black history from using images of Dr. Martin Luther King to holding "Brown is Beautiful" placards.[42]

Next door, the Georgia Board of Regents banned undocumented students from attending its

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[38] Dereck Thompson, "American Migration Patterns Should Terrify the GOP," *The Atlantic*, September 17, 2019 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/american-migration-patterns-should-terrify-gop/598153/>
[39] Ibid.
[40] Yalidy Matos, "A Legacy of Exclusion: The Geopolitics of Immigration and Latinas/os in the South," New Directions in the Latina/o South: A Roundtable, *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History* 16, no. 3 (2019): 87-94.
[41] Cecilia Màrquez, "'Juan Crow' and the Erasure ofs Blackness in the Latino/a South," New Directions in the Latina/o South: A Roundtable, *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History* 16, no. 3 (2019): 79-86.
[42] Jennifer E. Brooks, "No Juan Crow!": Documenting the Immigration Debate in Alabama Today," *Southern Cultures* 18, no. 3 (2012): 49-56.

top five public universities and denied them in-state tuition. That a Southern state was again banning a community of color from obtaining a public education has not gone unnoticed. Indeed, many people have organized to overturn this legislation and have drawn inspiration and lessons from the long Civil Rights Movement and even established Freedom University to offer undocumented students college courses.[43] In addition to these discriminatory education policies, many Southern law enforcement agencies such as police departments and sheriff's offices have enrolled in the 287(g) Program, part of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.[44] The provision authorizes the Department of Homeland Security to enter into agreements with local law enforcement agencies so they can enforce immigration laws as long as officers receive training and are supervised by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In short, state employees can act as immigration officers.

Conclusion

The history of Latinas/os in the United States is long and deeply rooted in Southern states like Texas and Florida. However, it is also a contemporary history given the dynamic growth of Latina/o communities in other Southern states that previously had miniscule populations. As soon as Latinas/os entered the nation, they endured second-class citizenship and some of them mobilized against their marginalization by buying into the system of oppression and argued that segregation should not apply to them since they had European ancestry. Their experiences with segregation and the colorline were linked to the social and economic settings of particular places as well as the presence of other communities. The position of Latinas/os in relationship to citizenship is influenced by the incorporation of new arrivals, immigrants from Latin America

[43] Freedom University, "History," <https://freedom-university.org/timeline>
[44] U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act—Participating Entities," September 5, 2019, <https://www.ice.gov/287g>.

that join second, third, and fourth generation Latinas/os across places in the U.S. South. In this way the issue of the colorline continues to be a salient factor for Latina/o communities since immigrants add to the racial and ethnic diversity of Latinas/os already in the United States. In a similar manner, issues of illegality continue to define the experiences of Latinas/os since they often live in mixed-status communities where undocumented people live next to fifth-generation Latinas/os and everything in between. Perhaps more importantly, through illegality, Latinas/os are suspected of being "illegal aliens" and are treated as such. This suspicion can permeate a variety of areas including schooling and the workforce and takes on place-specific formations given the local setting as well as larger state and national anti-immigrant sentiments and legislation.

In the last half of the twentieth century, the experiences of Latinas/os in the South have been sharply defined by larger trends such as the growth of the Sunbelt, an effort by government and business interests to "develop" capital and labor but whose policies remained eerily similar to previous modes of the late nineteenth century. The mid-twentieth century was a period of great change as several kinds of civil rights legislation were passed but many white people, especially the working-class, believe such progress came at their expense and they started mobilizing through a "politics of rage" that continues to have consequences today. At the same time, the Latina/o community was diversifying. By the end of the twentieth century Latinas/os could no longer be defined, if they ever could, by Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican ancestry; instead there were also roots in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, et cetera. At the same time, there was a boom in Latinas/os migrating to Southern states that previously had small numbers of Latinas/os. Pushed by economic decline in other parts of the United States and drawn by abundant work opportunities, particularly in meat and poultry industries, and a low cost of living,

many Latinas/os decided to make their homes in Dixie.

The experiences of Latina/o Southerners are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single narrative because they live in areas as different as urban, suburban, or rural and in towns and counties that are majority-white, majority-Black, or some other combination. The kind of place matters in terms of the political power of a the Black and white community and how Latinas/os negotiate their position within that setting. Moreover, the history of the places helps to define issues of the colorline and whether Latinas/os attempt to establish themselves as white or to forge an identity as people of color which in turn affects relationships with Black communities and voters. Because Latinas/os are an ethnic group that can be of any racial background—Black, indigenous, Asian, or white—there is no monolithic way they negotiate the colorline. As people continue to learn to live together in racially and ethnically diverse communities there are opportunities to forge alliances and create something anew. In doing so the South and Latina/o Southerners can help lead the nation in the right direction.