

Mary E. Odem and Elaine Lacy (Eds). *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009. 175 pp.

By now it is well known that the Latino population in the U.S. South has grown dramatically in the past 10-15 years, and that virtually every aspect of southern life is transforming as a result. The secondary literature on the topic remains thin, and so the multidisciplinary edited volume *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South* is a welcome addition.

The book provides an excellent descriptive account of Latino immigration to the U.S. South. In an introduction that provides a very useful overview, Odem and Lacy lay out the book's purpose: to "present in-depth analyses of how immigration from Latin America is changing the region and how immigrants are adapting to the southern context" (ix). It focuses on five very broad themes: immigrant transnationalism, economic incorporation and impact, place-making and community building, changing racial dynamics, and southern responses to Latino immigration.

One of the book's strengths is that seven of the nine chapters are state-specific, thus providing geographic nuance. Combined they contain a rich collection of information that should prove valuable for researchers. At the same time, the chapters address a wide range of issue, including religious expression, refugee politics, union organizing, and economic impact, which at times reduces the coherency of the collection.

One of the critical questions that arise –though not always explicitly– in the chapters is the degree to which the southern experience with Latino immigration is different from other regions of the country.

In his chapter on Alabama, Raymond Mohl concludes that "Dixie appears to be on the cusp of a long-term process of Latinization, mirroring what has already happened in other parts of the United States" (65). Similarly, James H. Johnson Jr. and John D. Kasarda argue that changes in North Carolina are "[p]aralleling national trends" (70). But is it necessarily a mirror?

Angela C. Steusse, for example, notes the importance of progressive churches for organizing social movements in the South, something less common in traditional gateways. Even here, though, the comparison may need to delve into the differences between different religions. For example, Mary E. Odem shows how the Catholic Church in Atlanta did not necessarily embrace the Latino population, whose style of worship was quite different from the suburban middle class.

Further, virtually all of the chapters note the importance of race, which takes a unique form in the South. Race has always been viewed in Black-White terms, and desegregation is still very much in recent memory. It is worth exploring whether the racialized discourse in the South takes a different form than, say, in Los Angeles. The picture becomes even more complex when, as Jamie Winders' chapter notes, Latinos are competing for jobs not only with African Americans but also with resettled refugees.

Finally, the chapters make clear that, like in the rest of the country, the political response in the South has not followed any obvious patterns. Legislators in Georgia have been the most active in pushing restrictionist laws, yet DeKalb County (part of Atlanta) has been accommodating. Some mayors believe immigrants revitalize the local economy, while others do their best to make life difficult, hoping they will leave.

Overall, then, the volume offers much to ponder. It would work very well in a classroom, as it raises a number of interesting and important questions that scholars have only just begun to explore.

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