

**CORAZÓN DE DIXIE: MEXICANOS IN THE U.S. SOUTH SINCE 1910.** By Julie M. Weise. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 344 pages. Paperback \$32.50.

In *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910*, Julie Weise asks scholars to look beyond the Southwest borderlands in order to expand our geographic scope to better reflect the complex lives of Mexicans and Chicana/os in the United States. By documenting Mexican migrants' search for alternative places to work since the 1910s, a quest that took them to states such as Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina, Weise gives us a deeper understanding of "race, class, citizenship, and national belonging throughout greater Mexico and the United States" (3). Her study offers over a decade of archival research that is centered on the experience and perspectives of marginal and poor Mexicano migrants, including those recruited through the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964.

As a regional history of the US South, the book follows in the tradition of works that decenter our traditional sense of place in the field of Chicana and Chicano history. These studies include Leon Fink's *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Heather Smith and Owen Furueth's *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place* (University of North Carolina, 2006); Carlos Kevin Blanton's *A Promising Problem: The New Chicana/o History* (University of Texas Press, 2016); as well as Perla M. Guerrero's *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (University of Texas Press, 2017). Weise seeks to capture the aspirations that led Mexicans and Mexican Americans to seek work in the South, the struggles they waged, and the strategies they used to leverage the power within their grasp—locally, nationally, and internationally, within families, communities, or distant bureaucracies (6). She asks, "Why was this Mexican man picking cotton in Arkansas in 1949? What did he hope to achieve in Arkansas, and what were his experiences while there?" Her study redirects our attention to the experiences and strategies of Mexicano migrants in spaces traditionally imagined as black and white (3). She also considers how white and

African American Southerners in different economic positions responded to the newcomers, in turn revealing their own strategies of advancement.

I was drawn to the book's intensive archival approach and its interpretation of nontraditional historical sources. Weise conducted approximately eighty personal interviews with white, black, Mexicano, and Latino respondents. She also draws on oral history interviews of braceros, newspaper articles, church records, census reports, and government documents. Less traditional forms of evidence include photo albums of Mexican families and farmers. These photos provide insight into what she describes as "the imaginative lives that migrants led outside the surveillance of local, national, or international institutions" (7). Weise notes that the use of personal photos reveals the ways in which Mexican migrant workers in Georgia, for example, viewed the world around them, and in so doing evokes another story and another location that is not California or Texas. Her integration of archival and nontraditional forms of evidence is representative of various works in the fields of migration history and cultural studies. She captures what Alicia Schmidt Camacho describes as "enunciations of the distinct historical consciousness of migrant subjects" emerging from a transborder migratory circuit (*Migrant Imaginaries*, New York University Press, 2008). As Weise suggests, nontraditional sources help reveal "how places of origin, transit, and destination shaped migrants' worldviews, identities, and politics" (7).

Immersing herself in multiple archives in Mexico, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington, DC, Weise demonstrates the importance of looking beyond national borders in order to "illuminate more clearly the main characters and plotlines that have long preoccupied historians" (3). To accurately capture why braceros were picking cotton in Arkansas in the 1940s, historians must trace the workers' complicated journey, one that begins in their homeland. Specifically, Weise documents how cultural and state power shaped "Mexican immigrants in generationally and regionally distinct ways across the twentieth century" (7). The book charts the recruitment and arrival of migrants in worksites throughout the South, and argues that their migration was driven by culture and by ideas of race and labor.

Weise disrupts our ideas of geographic essentialism in Chicana/o history. Her chapters on places and spaces like New Orleans and rural Georgia contest traditional notions of geographic spaces where Mexicanos resided. As Blanton suggests in *A Promising Problem*, a new borderlands history must address the relationship between Chicana/os, Native Americans, blacks,

whites and other migrants outside the Southwest. Weise pays particular attention to everyday actions and movements within specific settings. By focusing on a place-specific process of racial formation, she provides us with a model of how racial hierarchies are created, negotiated, destroyed, changed, and mobilized in the South. Although she is not a cultural geographer like Perla Guerrero, whose work privileges a relational and regional approach to studying racialization, Weise powerfully demonstrates a more nuanced way of situating place and race within Chicana/o history.

The chapters follow a chronological order. In chapter 1, in order to demonstrate that the racialization of Mexicanos in New Orleans was a different racial project from the one that affected their counterparts in Texas, Weise engages in a zooming-out process that allows her to look beyond national borders and histories. Drawn to New Orleans's international flavor and its fame as the "gateway to the Americas" in the 1920s, immigrants easily incorporated themselves from the moment of arrival (23). Weise illustrates how middle-class Mexican migrants, fleeing political and economic instability in the wake of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, were able to create "a Europeanized version of *Mexicanidad*, perceptions of Mexicanness" (17).

Courting a Europeanized whiteness, they were allowed to quietly assimilate into white communities and choose white marriage partners. Their ability to weave in and out of racial spaces was typical of a variety of in-between groups, such as Creoles and Italians, who "pursued distinct strategies toward social mobility and status" (16). Middle-class Mexicanos quickly learned to navigate their surroundings and soon mobilized identities that occupied "a spot within the white racial category in New Orleans" (28).

By documenting racialization processes born of necessity, Weise powerfully illustrates how concepts of race are shaped by everyday actions within a specific place. Chapters 2 and 3 chart the migration of Mexican families to Jim Crow Mississippi and Arkansas from 1918 through the early 1960s. As the US and Mexican economies expanded during and after World War II, the US government, along with Southern farmers, recruited and enlisted braceros from Mexico. Mexicanos and Mexican Americans arrived to sell their physical labor to plantation managers, who faced large-scale African American out-migration. During this time, planters did all they could to keep Mexicanos in their fields, including resorting to violence. That violence, however, was largely resisted and rejected by Mexicans.

Mexican cotton workers successfully resisted Jim Crow and rejected poor labor conditions through a variety of actions. Unlike Mexicanos in

New Orleans, who hailed from a range of economic backgrounds, braceros pursued belonging and social mobility through advocacy—what Weise calls a Mexican strategy. In particular, braceros advocated against violence and segregation by establishing relationships with Mexican consulates. For instance, when braceros faced segregation, low salaries, bad food, and horrible living conditions in their labor camps, “Mexican migrants and bureaucrats placed a transnational weight on the Delta’s political scale” (85). Braceros marched for over a hundred miles to see the consulate in Memphis and demanded better working conditions, acceptable food, and fair treatment. The political battles waged by braceros and Mexican consulates contest historians’ depictions of this period as a time when the “Mexican government steadily lost control and bargaining power in the bracero program” (85). While evidence suggests that political battles waged by braceros in the Mississippi and Arkansas deltas were uneven, Weise documents how Mexicanos gained admission to the white establishment by the mid-1950s by leveraging their international power (108). I would have liked more insights into African American discussions of their Mexicano neighbors in Mississippi and Arkansas, as well as more details about how the two groups shared workspaces and barrios and sent their children to the same segregated public schools. Chapter 3 may be of particular interest to those studying braceros, labor in the South, claims of belonging, school desegregation cases, and the advocacy role of Mexican consulates in the United States.

Chapter 4 may be the most thought-provoking section for historians studying what Weise calls the “Viejo” New South. She explores life in rural Georgia from the 1960s to the 1990s through the use of family photo albums. For the author, personal photographs rather than written records represent “the most extensive archive of daily experiences available to historians” (144). During this period white people documented their relationships with Mexican employees using cameras. The photos not only document the relationships between white, black, and Mexican workers throughout the South but also capture Mexicanos’ social acceptance in white communities as charity cases (11). According to Weise, this acceptance was due to conservative white people’s racial and neoliberal ideals of Mexicanos as hard-working, assimilating individuals of good moral character. She describes these actions and attitudes of white growers and middle-class Christians in rural Georgia as a pro-immigrant conservatism. One might ask, then: what was the effect of this particular pro-immigrant conservatism or Mexicano “uplift” in Georgia in the past, and what are

the repercussions today? What racial relations and descriptors did this new phase of Christian paternalism create for others living in rural parts of Georgia, specifically blacks? Moreover, to what extent was the formation of a Mexican and Mexican American subjecthood during this time grounded in black racial formation or anti-blackness? Could we read this chapter as narrating a sophisticated form of upholding white supremacy that maintained the color line without making substantial changes to southern Georgia's institutional structure of racism?

Weise's project has much to teach us about Mexicanos in the US South and how they combated discrimination, crafted new strategies, and formed alliances to pursue progress. She writes, "Mexicanos' future choices and strategies will join a longer legacy as they shape these histories of the post-Civil War United States, postrevolutionary Mexico, and the cross-border struggle over the meaning of race and the claiming of rights" (224). Her text will interest Chicana and Chicano historians and new borderlands cultural studies scholars, cultural geographers, and scholars of immigration, labor and the Bracero Program, segregation, neoliberalism, and political activism. In recovering the history and agency of Mexicanos in what is sometimes called the Nuevo South, *Corazón de Dixie* helps build scholarship that points to a new direction in Chicana and Chicano history, one that disrupts geographic essentialism, spotlights interracial relations, and documents the multiple experiences of Mexicanos in the United States.

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