

# **Márquez, C. (2023) *Making the Latino South: A History of Racial Formation*. University of North Carolina Press.**

## **Review by Emiliano Aguilar**

While most people today are accustomed to hearing “south of the border” regarding the international divide between the United States and Mexico, few might think of it as referring to the Carolinas. Yet, in Cecilia Márquez’s wonderfully engaging book, *Making the Latino South*, we are brought to the dynamic roadside attraction South of the Border along Interstate 95, which opened in 1949. What was once a beer depot became a sprawling campus, including a motel, amusement park, several restaurants, souvenir shops, and the cartoonish mascot, Pedro. And when Alan Schafer, the founder, opened Confederateland on the property, he effectively merged the stereotypical fetishization of Mexico with a “Lost Cause” ideology during the civil rights movement.

While this ironic historical happenstance occurs in a community that recorded less than two dozen Mexican-born residents for decades, the book at large documents the dynamic racial landscape of the US South from the 1940s to the early 2000s. *Making the Latino South* not only joins an exciting field of scholarship about Latinas/os outside of the Southwest, New York, and Florida but offers readers a provocative goal: to interrogate how non-Black Latinos navigated whiteness and the logic of white supremacy. Márquez argues that in the South, Latinas/os were incorporated not as white people “but as Black and non-Black Latino people who were marked as racially distinct while at the same time being integrated into whiteness and Blackness” (7).

For decades, the US South represented a land of hope for Latin American migrants, akin to how U.S. historians framed northern urban communities for African American migrants, leaving the South for cities like Chicago, Detroit, Gary, and Milwaukee. This parallel serves as the opening anecdote, as the Soto family leaves Texas in the late 1950s for the Mississippi Delta, where they made nearly triple their weekly income, and their daughter did not face the same educational discrimination from white peers as she had in Texas. The Soto family, and many like them, discovered that for non-Black Latinos, race worked differently in the South than it had in the Southwest. Non-Black Latinos found the region and its infamous system of Jim Crow as both simultaneously capacious and rigid in managing Blackness and non-Blackness.

This did not remain the case for the increasing number of migrants in the region. Márquez traverses the region in the second half of the twentieth century to understand the trajectory of non-Black Latinos from “professionally white” to “hardworking immigrants” to “illegal aliens.” The book emphasizes three fundamental temporal shifts: the pre-civil rights movement, the post-civil rights movement, and the post-9/11 United States. At each of these moments, non-Black Latinos find themselves gradually removed from the benefits and privileges of whiteness, increasingly becoming the fuel to white backlash to demographic change, economic woes, and heightened nativist sentiments.

*Making the Latino South* encompasses five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion that promise quite different perspectives to this narrative of change and continuity concerning non-Black Latino racialization in the South. While the chapters proceed chronologically, they are meant to detail how Latina/o migrants uncovered new truths pertaining to race in the South. Márquez describes the first three as a frame to understand how provisional whiteness impacted Latina/o migrants.

Márquez shows both the rigidity and flexibility of Jim Crow for Latinas/os in the South. The first chapter is framed around Karla Rosel Galarza, the stepdaughter of the farmworker organizer, intellectual, and activist Ernesto Galarza. When the Galarzas relocated from California to Washington D.C. in 1936, they were able to benefit from their non-Blackness by living in a segregated white community in northern Virginia. However, when Karla decided to enroll into the segregated Black Margaret Murray Washington Vocational School, questions concerning their racial status positioned a moment of confusion for Jim Crow that, as Márquez argues, established a Black and non-Black categorization. Karla Galarza was ordered to transfer to a white school and ultimately, the segregation case was not taken to court.

Turning to the Deep South, another chapter restructures narratives of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to include the often-untold stories of Latina and Latino activists and organizers in the region. These men and women navigated their professional whiteness to the benefit of their activism but also had contested outcomes as the movement came to emphasize Blackness, leaving non-Black Latinos and white members expelled from SNCC overnight. Latina/o SNCC activists, while granted a degree of flexibility as white in their activism in Jim Crow South, were still ultimately viewed as non-Black by SNCC's Black members.

The final chapters turn from professional whiteness to the instrumentalization of Latina/o immigrants into the South. Increasingly, Latina/o migrants found themselves instrumentalized or increasingly associated with their potential or essential role as laborers despite their existence being defined by much more than their work. Turning to Dalton, Georgia, the fourth chapter notes that with the construction of 'Hispanic' and the increasing dependency on Latinas/os as laborers, the construction of these immigrants as "hardworking" became a cornerstone of their racialization. Industriousness and its association with Latinos instrumentalized the immigrants as laborers. In the fifth and final chapter, anti-immigrant sentiments drew "Latino" and "illegal" into a synonymous relationship as the Great Recession fueled draconian legislation. In documenting the proliferation of anti-immigrant legislation of the early 2000s, Márquez notes how Latinos became a hardened racial category, firmly entrenching these essential immigrants as minorities.

*Making the Latino South* is thought-provoking and raises questions and potential new research threads for future scholars. However, I would have liked more engagement with class and white supremacy. For instance, I thoroughly enjoyed Márquez's reinsertion of Latinas and Latinos into the story of SNCC and its lessons for multiracial unity and coalition work. That said, other Latinas/os served as the counter to these activists. Leander Perez, Louisiana's famed segregationist and district judge, comes to mind. In grappling with how some Latinos, like the Galarza family, benefitted from white supremacy with housing and education, for instance, Márquez's work offers an opportunity to engage with the individuals that more willingly embraced white supremacist

ideology in navigating these racial landscapes. Simply, not all Latinas/os opposed Jim Crow and the ambiguous racial order it erected for them.

Overall, *Making the Latino South* is a must-read for those interested in the US South and its history of race, civil rights, and immigration. The book is a welcome addition to the histories of the modern US and begins to grapple with the wave of anti-immigration legislation at the turn of the century. Márquez' work will surely be a cornerstone of future studies concerning the Latina and Latino South as scholars continue to grapple with the complex racial landscapes of the region. More importantly, the work -- much as a generation of scholars of the Latina and Latino Midwest has done -- reminds its reader that the South is not a new destination for Latinas and Latinos. Instead, the South is significantly defined by its Latino presence.

### **Reviewer Bio**

**Emiliano Aguilar** is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. He is currently writing a book, *Building a Latino Machine: Caught Between Corrupt Political Machines and Good Government Reform*, about how ethnic Mexicans and Puerto Ricans navigated and utilized corruption to further their inclusion in a midwestern Rust Belt community.