

## Book Review

*Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South Since 1910.* By Julie Weise. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xii, 358 pages. \$32.50.

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In the past two decades, observers and chroniclers of the US South too often have remarked that the “recent” influx of Mexican migrants has suddenly reshaped the region’s demographic profile and forced a reckoning of traditional black–white race relations. As Julie Weise convincingly argues in her outstanding new work, *Corazón de Dixie*, those remarks ignore a long and complex history of *Mexicanos* in the US South that witnessed whites, blacks, and Mexicans — each in their own way — vying for resources, opportunities, and rights since the early decades of the twentieth century. Simultaneously, the work disaggregates the forms and functions of Mexican state power across generations, helping us understand how national and state governments interacted with and advocated for migrants in different parts of the US South.

Far from ignoring national histories and the unique experiences of people of Latin American and Caribbean heritage (also known as *Latina/os* or *Hispanics*) in the United States, Weise contributes to new scholarly approaches that build upon country-specific narratives examining the economic and social dimensions of *Latina/o* migration in the United States and in Latin America. *Corazón de Dixie* complicates and reframes understanding of these mutually constitutive transnational stories. In this same vein, it expands our knowledge of multi-ethnic and racialized ethnicities (e.g., Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, Japanese Brazilian, Arab Mexican) within US *Latina/o* and Latin American contexts.

The monograph is organized into five chapters that chart the movement of Mexican migrants starting in the early twentieth century to destinations across the US South and examine varied histories of transnational labor, politics, and racialization. Beginning in chapter 1, *Corazón de Dixie*’s focus on Mexican residents in New Orleans disrupts long-held assumptions of race and belonging in the US South. As it demonstrates, thousands of Mexicans originating from locations along the Gulf Coast made their way to the Louisiana port city in the 1910s. More Caribbean than southern, New Orleans’s racial orientation allowed recently arrived Mexican migrants to resist the pernicious impact of the Jim Crow system and assert a white, Europeanized identity. With unique ease, Mexican immigrants and their government’s consular representatives in New Orleans managed to navigate a relatively unproblematic route to white assimilation during the interwar period.

Chapter 2 turns to north-central Mexico and the historical heartland of Mexican migrants as they journeyed first to Texas in the 1920s and then to new areas with growing employment opportunities, such as the cotton fields of Mississippi. Fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) only to encounter the racial violence of Texas, Mexican migrants fared no better with Mississippi plantation bosses who employed racist oppression to limit labor rights and mobility. Although many migrants escaped, those who stayed drew on the newfound transborder powers of Mexico’s postrevolutionary government to claim limited gains of racial equality.

Chapter 3 examines the expansion of migrant activism during and after World War II, when Mexico and the United States agreed to a binational labor program that sent hundreds of thousands of Mexican “*braceros*” to the US South and beyond. While white farmers hoped to suppress workers’ wages and rights, Mexican migrants in the Arkansas Delta

continued their partnership with an activist consul and successfully protested to improve working conditions, gain access to white-only establishments, and recover lost wages. Those gains, however, were short lived as members of a dominant white US society continued to stereotype and marginalize Mexicans, ultimately forcing many to leave the state.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the years after the 1965 US Immigration Act and the rapid expansion of *Mexicano* populations throughout the United States and, in particular, to the US South. In this period of increased globalization and related neoliberal, free-trade economic policies, white elites in states like Georgia and South Carolina moved away from perceived biological determinants of race and instead emphasized cultural traits of morality and assimilability to categorize and control migrant laborers. As *Mexicanos* could no longer rely on their federal government for protection and advancement in the United States, they turned to local religious and community agencies for support. As Weise argues throughout *Corazón de Dixie*, migrants ultimately “engaged in intensely local struggles [in the US South] to determine their place in racial and social hierarchies” (13).

*Corazón de Dixie* is a valuable resource for historians and scholars of race, ethnicity, and migration in both Mexico and the United States. The rich and

detailed, binational and multi-state archival sources Weise draws on exemplify the type of research required for a deep historical understanding of transnational migration. In addition to examining traditional government files in Mexico and the United States, Weise turns to a nearly comprehensive set of church records, local newspapers, oral history interviews, and personal papers and photographs. This range and depth of material allow her to situate the intimate and imaginative experiences of migrants and their families in their larger historical and structural contexts. In addition, Weise employs an innovative historical sampling methodology where she integrates and cross-references local and state census data with information found on Ancestry.com to determine critical and hard-to-determine social categories of migrants such as race and occupation.

*Corazón de Dixie* also contributes to the growing efforts in digital humanities and includes a companion website (<http://corazondedixie.org>) with select primary source documents, maps, images, and a blog with entries examining new research on the topic and its contemporary relevance. This pedagogic innovation will broaden student access to the work, allowing instructors to more effectively utilize the material in undergraduate and graduate classes.