



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), or [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South, 1910-2010

Institution: California State University, Long Beach

Project Director: Julie M. Weise

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

MEXICANS AND MEXICAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S. SOUTH, 1910-2010

Julie M. Weise

In the wake of the recent dramatic increase in Latino migration to the U.S. South – the Latino population of six Southern states tripled from 1990 to 2000 – journalists, activists, and policymakers have proclaimed a “Nuevo” South.¹ The upcoming 2010 census results promise a new wave of such proclamations.

My project challenges these assumptions of Southern Latinos’ “newness” on empirical and analytical grounds, with consequences for U.S. and Latin American histories as well as those grappling with the South’s contemporary “Latinization.” The growing and excellent body of social science research on Latino migration to the South has followed popular discourse in assuming the phenomenon is new to the region’s history. But my work in previously unexplored archival collections shows that the South has nearly a century of Latino history prior to 1990. Today’s Southern Latinos do not herald a “new” global, transnational South that has moved “beyond” the binary of black and white. Rather, communities of Mexican immigrants, now mostly forgotten, have raised challenges to the region’s color line since the early twentieth century. The legal and social cultures of segregation proved resilient by adapting to and incorporating those challenges, to Mexicans’ benefit or detriment. Power flowed in both directions as white supremacy and bi-racial thinking came to influence the more fluid ideas of race that prevailed in Latin America. I am seeking NEH support for one year of full-time research to revise this dissertation project into a book.

Contribution / My history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South since 1910 “recovers” tens of thousands of immigrants who had been lost to the historical record, revealing the origins of the contemporary wave of immigration. It also joins typically discrete subfields of U.S. history – Southern and Mexican American – and conceptualizes a transnational history of racial formation between the United States and Mexico.

In so doing, the book shifts the terrain on which these historiographies rest. The primary accomplishment of Mexican American history since its growth in the 1970s has been to offer a powerful critique of race relations in the Southwest, explaining how the white-Mexican fault line emerged there and how Mexicans and Mexican Americans resisted its consequences. Through time, however, the field’s critiques, assumptions and hypotheses have come into greatest focus when viewed in comparative perspective. While historians have begun to write the histories of ethnic Mexicans in the Midwest, the Northwest, and New York, my research on the black-white South challenges existing understandings in the field. It shows that Mexicans in the South often had the unique possibility of being considered white –but that this possibility ebbed and flowed in response to shifts in power between the Mexican state, Southern whites, and Southern blacks.

For their part, historians of the twentieth-century South have sought to understand the resilience of the Jim Crow system despite constant resistance from African Americans, the long history of the Civil Rights Movement, and the reconfiguration of both segregation and conservatism after the defeat of white supremacy. My study takes its place among a newly emerging body of scholarship that asks how “in-between” groups like Native Americans and immigrants from Italy or China disrupted the color line itself. I want to push Southern historians to take the experiences of these “in-between” groups seriously, as central rather than marginal actors in the region’s past.

My research challenges Southern history in large part by describing how Mexican state actors affected racial formations in a U.S. region often characterized as provincial. Ideas about race and

¹ Rakesh Kochar, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya, “The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth,” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).

citizenship were not regionally bounded, but were part of an international dialogue. I examine Mexican consulate records and analyze Mexican immigrants' actions through the lens of not only U.S., but also Mexican history. In the process, I reveal the interactions between Mexican racial ideas emphasizing *mestizaje* (race-mixing) and binary Southern racial ideas, the latter based first on biology and later on a class politics that preserved white privilege while avoiding discussions of race. My research thus brings into relief the profound influence of the United States on the development of Mexican nationalism and racial thinking. It also shows how Southern racial systems changed in response to the challenges of dark-skinned foreigners pursuing social mobility through transnational political power. In all, these migrations of people, cultures, and ideas about race and citizenship shaped multiple regions and nations but were contained by none of them.

Research / The book manuscript is based on my dissertation, which was awarded the George Washington Egleston Historical Prize from Yale's History department in 2009. Archival sources, most of them previously unused by historians, include Mexican consular archives and U.S. state, municipal, and church records, as well as dozens of newspapers. To capture the experiences of those who left little trace in written records, I collected immigrants' family photographs and papers and conducted oral history interviews, many in Spanish, with Southern whites, African Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans, all from a variety of political and social class backgrounds.

Rather than a single-sited community study as is common in U.S. ethnic history, the dissertation created five case studies grounded in multiple research sites. This structure, which I will retain in the book, best captures the unique history of Mexicans in the South because prior to 1970, communities of Mexicans appeared in particular locales, then moved on, assimilated, or some combination of the two. Telling a story across time thus requires moving around in space.

Accordingly, Chapter 1 follows the largely middle class Mexican immigrants who moved to New Orleans during and after the Mexican revolution and quickly assimilated into white society, aided by their active consulate. The second chapter recovers the history of the Mississippi Delta's interwar Mexican cotton laborers, who drew the Mexican consulate into transnational cultural and political strategies to achieve the social mobility that had eluded them in Texas. Chapter 3 examines 1939-64, when Mexican *braceros* (guest workers) in Arkansas found themselves socially marginalized and economically exploited even after they gained admission to white public space, again with the assistance of Mexican state actors. The last two case studies discuss the period after the demise of both Jim Crow's legitimacy and that of the Mexican state. They explore Mexicans' place within the "color-blind" but racially informed class politics that came to dominate the South during the final decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 4 examines Mexicans and Mexican Americans migrating between Florida and rural Georgia 1955-1994, showing that in rural, agricultural areas whites were eager to incorporate Mexicans socially as long as Mexicans kept silent about labor abuses, asked little of Great Society programs, and distanced themselves from blacks. Chapter 5 focuses on Greater Charlotte, North Carolina 1990-2010. Charlotte exemplifies an emerging urban-suburban divide, in which pro-business urban whites and black Democrats promoted the integration of Mexican immigrants, while the suburban and exurban white middle class rejected them.

Methods and Work Plan / While my dissertation successfully constructed five case studies that revise the fields of U.S. Southern, Mexican American, and Mexican history, in the book I want to do more, both empirically and analytically. Empirically, while the field research for Chapters 1-3 is complete, chapters 4 and 5 require substantial further research. Analytically, I plan to expand the explanatory framework of my work in response to colleagues' suggestions. This will include highlighting my contribution to ethnic and racial studies generally; situating my case studies within particular moments of mass migration globally and discussing their significance to global migration

studies; and engaging methodological discussions on the use of photographs as sources in immigration history. I have been awarded an NEH Summer Fellowship for 2010, which I will use to complete the field research in Georgia for Chapter 4 and to conduct an initial revision of that chapter prior to beginning the peer review process with two interested publishers in fall of 2010.

With NEH support starting in 2011, I will then spend four months completing the research for Chapter 5 in Charlotte. Since most archival sources are unavailable for such a recent period, the dissertation chapter relied upon English- and Spanish-language newspapers, municipal immigration policy debates, community groups' papers, and 16 interviews I conducted with a cross-section of Mexican immigrants, immigrant activists, Mexican government officials, and whites and African Americans who were both pro- and anti-immigrant. When I return to Charlotte, I will conduct at least 35 more oral history interviews and collect more immigrant family papers and photographs for analysis. I will also complete my review of the Spanish-language newspaper *La Noticia*, available at the public library, and update my analysis of local immigration policy debates. While the dissertation chapter sketched the broad contours of the urban-suburban divide in immigration politics, the new research will enable me to more deeply analyze the identities and politics of immigrants themselves.

I will then spend the remainder of my leave writing: three months re-writing Chapter 5 to incorporate the new research; four months completing an overall revision to incorporate the new levels of analysis described above and implement changes in response to publishers' readers reports, which I should have in hand by early 2011; and finally, one month updating my readings in the exploding social science literature on Latinos in the contemporary South in order to write a strong Conclusion chapter. The Conclusion will reinforce how my research both speaks to and productively challenges multiple scholarly fields, from Latinos in the South, to several sub-fields of U.S. and Latin American histories, to the study of ethnicity, race, and migration in other contexts. At the conclusion of my Faculty Award research year, I anticipate that the book will be complete.

Competencies, Skills, and Access / I have the linguistic skills, training in oral history methodologies, and contacts necessary to execute this research successfully. I conducted more than 50 interviews in the South during the course of my dissertation research. The majority of these were in Spanish, a language I speak, read, and write fluently. Finally, on my initial research trip to Charlotte in 2008, I acquired a broad range of contacts with whom I have maintained communication, and who have offered to help me make further connections on my return visit.

Final Product and Dissemination / Students in U.S. and Latin American history, particularly the subfields of Mexican American, Southern, Latino, and Mexican history, are my primary audience. The scholarly audience should encompass these fields as well as others engaged with migration, race, and transnational history. My two top choices for publication, University of California Press and University of North Carolina Press, are both interested in this type of cross-marketing, and have agreed to consider the manuscript simultaneously. After an initial revision of Chapter 4 this summer, I will submit the manuscript to both presses in fall of 2010. Thus, by the time I start my Faculty Award period in 2011, I expect to have a contract and a fresh set of reader's reports in hand.

The demand for historical work on Latinos in the South is evident, as my 2008 article in *American Quarterly* already appears on syllabi and has drawn interest from social scientists who chronicle the contemporary "Latinization" of the South. Universities in the South are now responding to the region's demographic changes by expanding their offerings in Latino Studies. My book will give professors there a unique and powerful teaching resource: historical reading that addresses their own region. Indeed, my book will enable the first large generation of Southern Latino college students to consider their own experiences in relation to those of earlier migrants who lived between a transnational Latin America and a South constructed as black-and-white.

Julie M. Weise
NEH Faculty Award – Bibliography

Selected primary sources

Archives of Mexico's Secretariat of Foreign Relations, Mexico City
Archives of Arkansas State University, Jonesboro
Catholic diocesan archives and parish sacrament records
Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia
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