



Sunbelt Diaspora: Race, Class and Latino Politics in Puerto Rican Orlando.

Patricia Silver

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Review by Gianncarlo Muschi. First published online 7 July 2020.

Orlando, Florida has become a new home for many Puerto Ricans and Latinx migrants and a fascinating scenario to examine their struggles for community formation and political empowerment at the turn of the twentieth century. Patricia Silver offers a groundbreaking perspective on the recent social history and politics of this city by unravelling the dynamics of race, class and place-making in the development of a heterogeneous community. Silver finds that the black-white racial code that has historically shaped Orlando's sociopolitical life intersects with the "divergent experiences" of class, national origin, and politics that Latinxs bring to this space. She argues that in this contested context Latinxs frame "understandings of collective experience as a basis for political action" in order to respond to exclusionary legislation that delineates local political and social structures. Silver presents the case of the Orange County redistricting process that followed the 2010 Census in which she personally became involved.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first, Silver describes Orlando's historical, political, and geographical space as a racialized context to which Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs have arrived and attempted to assert themselves. In chapter one, the author depicts Orlando as a place with its own socioracial order shaped by Jim Crow's black and white binary. These racial codes intersect with different experiences of race, class, and place that Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs bring from their countries of origin and other U.S. cities. These "local and translocal" relations, experiences, and understandings are a source of tension in Orlando's social space and outline the particular dynamics that Latinxs have to navigate to claim social and political space. In chapter two, Silver reveals that public narratives of Orlando as a neoliberal and multicultural color-blind place are actually constructed to maintain racial-ethnic hierarchies and sociopolitical practices in favor of those in power. Puerto Ricans and Latinxs arriving in contemporary Orlando have to confront these rules that reproduce



privileges and inequalities in order to organize themselves for community formation and political participation.

The second section of the book contains three chapters. In chapter three, Silver examines how the racial, ethnic, and class forces at play in Orlando shaped collective identifications of Puerto Ricans and Latinxs in the public sphere. For a while, these groups held an honorary white status that made them invisible in public space, but as more Puerto Ricans and Latinxs began moving to the area, they increased in visibility. Silver finds that “hypervisibility” set Latinxs apart from Orlando’s racial binary and gradually became racialized by the local society as a foreign population that speaks a different language. This “exclusionary inclusion,” as described by the author, has overlapped with Latinxs’ own conceptions of class, race, and place that ultimately have limited the construction of a collective identity for political representation. Chapter four details the emergence of Latinx activism demanding “the right to be different and to belong” in response to exclusion from participation in Orlando’s sociopolitical field. Silver reveals that the political experience that Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs brought from other places, along with local initiatives for collective organization, motivate them to politically respond to marginalization and discrimination. Chapter five describes the obstacles Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs faced for participation as an identifiable group in Orlando’s political field. Silver scrutinizes a variety of structural and procedural acts that have displaced Latinxs from positions of power.

The third section illustrates how these dynamics of racial and political exclusion blocked Latinxs’ access to Orlando’s political arena. In order to accomplish this task, Silver focuses on Latinx’s confrontation with electoral redistricting in Orange County since 2001. Silver reveals how intra-Latinx tensions associated with racial identification, national origin, deserving citizenship, and class relations disrupted the formation of a collective political representation. She utilizes the

Caribbean saying *balde de jueyes* (bucket of crabs) to portray the internal disputes that undermined Latinx’s political solidarity for the benefit of a power elite that ignored their claims for voting rights. Silver argues that the use of mapmaking technologies in the redistricting process served as vehicles for reproducing Orange County’s historically racial-ethnic and class hierarchies to maintain control by non-Latinx whites in local politics.

The author uses an anthropological approach that links ethnography, oral history, and archival research. However, the examination of mapping technologies transcends existing standards of research and analysis. The true value of this book is its ability to scrutinize the unseen sociopolitical realities that shape Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs’ efforts for community organization and political participation in this new place. Silver has made an impressive contribution to fields of Latinx migration and politics by focusing on the recent history of the understudied area of central Florida. Researchers, students, and a wider audience will be fully satisfied with the vivid life histories of this well-written book.

Dr. Gianncarlo Muschi earned a PhD in History and an MA in Sociology from the University of Houston, Texas where he worked as a lecturer in U.S. History. He investigates international migration, Latin American history, and U.S.-Latin American relations with an emphasis in South America. Dr. Muschi has published articles on the Latinx musical scene in Houston. He is an independent scholar currently writing a chapter about Latinx immigrants in New Jersey.