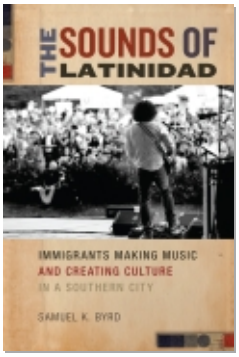
7. Race and the Expanding Borderlands Condition



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Race and the Expanding Borderlands Condition

Francisco's Story

Occasionally, while I was hanging out with musicians between sets at the bar, talk would turn to how they immigrated to the United States. One particularly memorable narrative of passage came from Francisco, a pianist/keyboard player from Honduras who is a member of a local rock band.[1] As a teenager, Francisco left home for the United States. He first had to travel through Mexico, which in itself was a perilous journey. He spent several days riding buses and praying not to be caught by Mexican police searching for Central American migrants. To cross into the United States, his family had arranged passage with a *coyote*, or human smuggler. The *coyote* placed him in the luggage hold of a long-distance bus going to Charlotte, and Francisco remained hidden behind passengers' bags throughout the many hours' journey to the city. Once in Charlotte, he bunked with distant relatives and found odd jobs doing mostly manual labor. He began to form a sense of community with new friends he made playing music, eventually joining a band.

However, as an undocumented immigrant with brown skin and *mestizo* facial features, limited English, and little money, Francisco fears being caught up in a police checkpoint and being deported. Although he often travels to work sites during the day, he hesitates to drive at night and often asks a bandmate to pick him up or drive him home after a gig. Depending on the night, the musicians who drive him home might be documented or undocumented, but they speak better English and know alternate routes to avoid common police checkpoints, giving him some solace. He worries that one wrong turn or slipped phrase in broken English could spell the end of his time in Charlotte and thousands of dollars in smuggler's fees if he wanted to return to the United States. Francisco's precarious situation illustrates the race- (and class-) based discrimina-

tory practices that undergird immigration policing in the U.S. South. In current anti-immigrant discourse, "illegal" and "Mexican" have become almost synonymous, with both taking on negative connotations through portrayals of working-class, brown-skinned immigrants as a threat to national integrity. Francisco embodies what it means to be "Mexican" in Charlotte (even though he is *hondureño*) because his immigration status, phenotype, and class place him in perpetual danger of arrest and deportation. However, as a musician, he uses personal connections to help avoid contact with police. Some immigrants are not so lucky. In this way, musicians show that they are somewhat more enabled members of the Latino population, using their experience and knowledge of nightlife to find their way home safely. By looking out for undocumented band members and friends, musicians also understand the fear and uncertainty that constitutes being "Mexican" in Charlotte, and they bring this empathy to their portrayals of *latinidad* in their music and performance. They also take time to think deeply about possible remedies to the situation of Latino immigrants to the city and the changing racial dynamics of the U.S. South.

A Race Problem

How does it feel to be a problem?
—W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

The issue facing Latino immigrants in the U.S. South in the twenty-first century is not exactly the color line analyzed by W. E. B. Du Bois a century ago. Yet like African Americans at the turn of the last century (and, one could argue, still today), Latino immigrants also face the social and psychological burden of understanding their position as a racial problem. Latina/o immigrants, in particular undocumented individuals, but by association other Latinos, are cast as criminal, or what the anthropologist Jonathan Inda calls "problem elements in the social body" that constitute a major portion of the "hoards of anti-citizens" targeted by neoliberal policing regimes (Inda 2006). This is part of a larger essentialization of immigrants as the "other," savage or culturally backward (Silverstein 2005). Debates about immigration, particularly through dominant anti-immigrant discourses, take on a

racialized and gendered tone that essentializes Latino immigration (by a pejorative usage of "Mexican"), correlates undocumented status with illegality (illegal means illegal), equates labor migration with invasion by foreign troops or malevolent pathogens, and stereotypes Latinas as hyperfertile and conspiring to subvert the U.S. Constitution (by giving birth to anchor babies). Moreover, this racialization takes on a sensory aspect as "Mexicans" are stereotypically seen as "dirty" and having a "smell" associated with their labor position (Holmes 2013). Paired with an expanding immigrant policing regime, this discourse makes up what Gilberto Rosas calls the "borderlands condition" that inscribes "exceptionality" (drawing on Agamben's idea of "state of exception" [2003]) on immigrant bodies through everyday violence and surveillance (Rosas 2006).

Scholars of the U.S.-Mexico border have long highlighted the region's exceptionality as a place of both lawlessness and expanding militarized policing, while also noting how regimes of racial, gender, and class exploitation help shape the political subjectivity of borderlands residents (Paredes 1958; McWilliams 1968; Montejano 1987; Peña 1985; Anzaldúa 1987; Limón 1994; Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán 2010). Informed by this scholarship, this chapter highlights how this legal exceptionalism has carried over to the treatment of Latino immigrants in other regions of the United States through the thickening of the borderlands condition (Rosas 2006) with the expansion of local immigration policing efforts. I argue that, in effect, the border has moved north, as local and state governments police immigrant communities using programs such as the 287(g) program, Secure Communities, and state laws passed in Arizona, Utah, Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama. North Carolina has been at the forefront of implementing the 287(g) program, and the state government has expanded restrictions by prohibiting access by undocumented immigrants to driver's licenses and higher education. Under the Obama administration, deportations of undocumented immigrants have ratcheted up to around 300,000 per year, including large numbers of parents with children who are U.S. citizens.[2]

These policy changes mark new forms of social and structural racism, expressed in the racialization of Latina/o immigrants and the exceptionality of immigration enforcement seemingly exempt from civil rights oversight. The passage of anti-immigrant legislation in many southern

states and the everyday policing of immigrant bodies through checkpoints, denial of public university admission, and refusal of access to social services for undocumented immigrants have led to a new southern landscape of Juan Crow (Lovato 2008). The U.S. South has responded to globalization by erecting a system of oppression for a new immigrant working class by marginalizing them through racial labeling, policing, social exclusion, and the delegitimation of their labor. Latina/o activists organizing to protest these conditions have mobilized mass marches and prominent actions, but face counterprotests, an entrenched class of policy makers who gain politically from targeting immigrant communities, and the failure of the federal government to construct a viable alternative to local devolution of immigration policy.[3] The immigration reform movement has been unable, nonetheless, to alter the increasing number of deportations, to fully rectify the status of the DREAM generation of undocumented students, or to exert pressure to alleviate the poor working conditions and wage theft suffered by immigrant laborers.

To understand the current racialization of Latino immigrants in the region, we must examine their plight in the context of the long history of racial segregation and violence in the U.S. South, along with the legacy of racism in Latin America from Spanish and Portuguese colonial race projects to the impact of U.S. imperialism. I briefly outline the U.S. history, and then turn to Latin America.

Despite portrayals of its monolithic and all-encompassing nature (in movies and popular novels), Jim Crow segregation varied in its implementation, legal apparatus, economic structures, and social dynamics from place to place in the U.S. South. Thus, the emergence of racially motivated terror squads and the construction of a revanchist legal and legislative system that marked the "Redemption" period of southern history occurred at varying speeds and degrees, starting with the drawdown of federal Reconstruction troops in the 1870s and intensifying with the codification of racial segregation in federal law with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and in related state laws enforcing racial segregation enacted around the same time (Woodward 1971). Despite attempts to construct a "scientific" hierarchy of races with clearly defined and marked boundaries (greatly aided by anthropologists of the era), the ambiguity of a mixed-race individual's identity and the capricious definitions of whiteness state to state were at the heart of the *Plessy* case (Baker 1998; Domin-

guez 1993). The segregated labor regime of piedmont North Carolina differed greatly from those in the cotton plantations of the Mississippi Delta, the prison farms of Louisiana or East Texas, or the turpentine forests of Florida, though all resulted in inequitable and repressive regimes (Hurston 1990; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1988; Hall et al. 1987; Wade 2012). Segregation also developed not in opposition to modernity, but as part and parcel of a "New South" that wanted, like Henry Grady, to attract northern capital for segregated industry, or like Booker T. Washington, to attract northern philanthropy for segregated education.

The Civil Rights movement found its greatest success by revealing the shaky foundations of the segregation monolith and its relation to modernity: boycotting businesses to pressure business elites to acquiesce; questioning scientific racism as the basis for "separate but equal"; juxtaposing nonviolence with violent repression in an age of mass media (especially television) coverage; and continually pressing a reluctant federal government to intervene in the face of international embarrassment during the Cold War (Baker 1998; Branch 1989; Caro 2002). The varied nature of segregation was also evident in the uneven manner in which civil rights gains progressed, with relative ease in Charlotte and Atlanta, and with great resistance in Selma and Birmingham. The expansion of organizing efforts to housing segregation in northern cities made it obvious that racism was a national issue, and not just endemic to the U.S. South.

Unfortunately, in hindsight, the Civil Rights movement appears to have provided only a brief respite from the racial revanchism that southern whites have reasserted in recent decades. White flight from cities, expansion of private and charter schools, defunding of public transit, and hollowing out of affirmative action policies have all led to a more subtle but just as effective form of segregation (Smith 2010; Greenhaw 1982). Which is not to say progress has been stopped; African Americans have made real political, social, and economic gains in many places in the region. But what is troubling is the emergence through anti-immigrant laws and politics of a racialized other in "Mexican" and "illegal" immigrants that parallels the punitive spirit of Jim Crow laws that relegated blacks to second-class status.

The history of race thinking and racism in Latin America is as variegated, if not more so, than that of the United States. Because of the

diversity of experiences, I will just discuss a few relevant examples here. The development of a Mexican national identity after the Mexican Revolution was built upon a philosophical intervention that promoted the cultural benefits of *mestizaje*, or the racial mixing of Spanish and indigenous roots to form the ideal Mexican national subject (Vasconcelos 1997). Although *mestizaje* challenged the racist philosophy of eugenics prevalent in the scientific community at the time by celebrating an interracial relationship (between Cortés and la Malinche) as the foundation of Mexican identity, it also relegated indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities to the margins of the nation-state (Hernández-Cuevas 2004). Only fairly recently, with examples like the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the 2005 "Memín Pinguín" controversy over black print cartoon characters, have issues of indigenous and Afro-Mexican identity become prominent in national debates about Mexican culture (Hayden 2002; Krauze 2005; Global Voices 2005). This led to the Mexican government recognizing the need for land reform for indigenous communities and the role Afro-Mexicans played as the "third root" of Mexican identity. However, many indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities remain marginalized from mainstream Mexican culture and continue to face problems related to the breakup of communal lands and small holdings in the wake of economic liberalization under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Hernández-Cuevas 2004; Vinson and Vaughn 2004; Lewis 2000).

The Dominican Republic undertook a national project of racial identification and gradation that had a similar effect of glossing over African heritage on the island. Under the dictator Rafael Trujillo, European and "Indian" identities were stressed in opposition to black and particularly Haitian identities (Sagás 2000). In 1937 Trujillo directed the massacre of an estimated twenty to thirty thousand Haitians working in the Dominican Republic and dark-skinned Dominican residents of areas near the Haitian border. Under a national identification card policy, mixed-race Dominicans were encouraged to stress their status as gradations of *indio* ("Indian"), such as *indio clarito*, *indio canelo*, or *indio quemao*, over terms that might reveal Afro-Caribbean identity. This had the effect of denigrating Afro-Dominican citizens and marginalizing their culture while highlighting a Eurocentric elite culture and an idealized indigenous past. Although Trujillo is long dead, the legacy of his national

project lingers in subtle forms of racism and race thinking throughout the island and its diaspora in the United States (Howard 2001; Candelario 2007; Gregory 2006; Adams 2006).

Many of the Spanish-speaking nations of South America also have historically privileged European heritage and a Latin American concept of whiteness over indigenous and African heritage. However, unlike the stark Jim Crow system of the United States, Latin American societies perpetuated a racism that was based more on subtle gradations of perceived skin pigmentation, often accompanied by class distinction with the whitening of wealthier elites regardless of skin color, but also restricted access to certain industries and positions based on racial mores. However, social movements made up of indigenous and Afro-descendant groups have periodically made claims for greater inclusion, rights, and/or autonomy throughout the region's history, with particular success in the past few decades. The emergence of a transnational indigenous people's movement, along with organizing among Afro-descendant groups, has led to the enshrinement of specific rights and protections in the constitutions and policy frameworks of countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Colombia (Tilley 2002; Hale 2002; Edelman 1999).

Brazil's "racial democracy" presents a related but somewhat divergent case in the region. The Portuguese colony was the largest importer of African slaves in the world; it also was the last slave-importing society in the Americas to outlaw slavery (1888). Brazil was also home to some of the most successful and long-lasting maroon colonies of escaped slaves. Brazil embarked on a twentieth-century racial project that encouraged mass immigration from Europe to whiten the population. However, an acknowledgment of widespread mixed-raced marriages led to the formation of an idea of national "racial democracy" that disavowed the overt racism of the United States or South Africa and attempted to clearly demarcate racial boundaries (even as the country eventually suffered under military dictatorship). But, as several scholars have pointed out (Telles 2004; Goldstein 2003; Twine 1997), Brazil's "racial democracy" also led to denials that racism was a problem in the country and the development of economic, educational, and political structures that favored richer, lighter-skinned citizens at the expense of the poor, Afro-descendant, and indigenous (all nonexclusive categories). By the end of

military rule in the late 1980s, Afro-descendant and indigenous groups had begun a push for greater autonomy and rights that, while similar to efforts elsewhere in the region, evolved in response to specific laws meant to acknowledge the maroon *quilombo* and indigenous contribution to Brazil's "racial democracy" (French 2009).

Race in Charlotte

It is in the context of the history of racism and race thinking in the United States and Latin America that I now outline in more ethnographic detail the experience of Latina/o immigrants to Charlotte. I highlight three themes that came to the forefront during my time in the city: (1) how southern *latinidad*, particularly in music, informs how Latina/o immigrants see themselves as racial subjects—from claims of "Mexican" identity to notions of whiteness and blackness within the Latino community; (2) the detrimental effects of racial profiling in immigration policing and the geography of racism in Charlotte; and (3) how Latino residents see Charlotte, in the context of the U.S. South, as a haven from racism and a site for creating antiracist and nonracist community in the face of anti-immigrant oppression.

Southern *latinidad* informs how Latina/o immigrants see themselves as racial subjects because it is often tied into relationships that highlight perceived racial difference and experiences that crystallize a sense of marginalization from or incompatibility with mainstream American society. These relationships and experiences include connections and disconnections with other Latinos (where ethnic and cultural difference are stressed or elided) and with whites, African Americans, and Asian Americans (where racial difference is stressed more often but spaces occasionally open for interracial cooperation). Although by focusing on musicians I gathered data on only a small portion of the Latina/o immigrant population, because of their diversity they represent the racial experiences of Latinos in Charlotte. I was able to document their experiences as musicians performing in venues across town, but also through their various day jobs. Because I observed musicians playing several genres from different national backgrounds, I saw multiple sides of the Latino experience with race. Many Latinos I spoke with expressed befuddlement about their place within U.S. racial categories and often

saw their identity connected more to nationality. Through interactions with the U.S. Census Bureau and other agencies asking demographic data questions, Latina/o immigrants were aware of how ill-fitting these racial categories were to their experience growing up in Latin America. Second-generation youth and immigrants brought here at a young age had the distinct experience of being accustomed to rigid racial categories, but finding themselves labeled "other." This meant that even though they felt "American," they did not belong to traditional southern racial classifications that hinged on being white or black.

I have outlined above how an expanding "borderlands condition" (Rosas 2006) in the form of immigration policing and anti-immigrant social policies has led to the framing of Latinos as a "problem." Perhaps the most insidious result of this shift has been the development of "Mexican" as a racial term. I define "Mexican" as a racial term because in anti-immigrant rhetoric and, indeed, in current popular linguistic usage it is deployed in ways that supersede a mere reference to nationality or national origin (Zavella 2011; De Genova 2005). Instead, "Mexican" has become a marker for brownness, "illegal" immigration status, indigenous facial features, working-class culture, perceived rurality, foreignness, and accented English. "Mexican" is used to describe the mass of immigrants, without actual concern for country of origin, so that many immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and elsewhere find themselves described thus, much to their chagrin. In 2008, high school students in Patchogue (Long Island), New York, who perpetuated a hate crime by stabbing to death an Ecuadorian immigrant, Marcelo Lucero, engaged in "Mexican hopping"—a sport of assaulting Latino men—and called their victim and his friend "Mexican" and "illegal" while beating them, even through the victims stated to their attackers that they were not Mexican.[4]

But the racialization of "Mexicans" extends beyond the actions of racist individuals into legal and political institutions that target immigrants. As several reports by the Southern Poverty Law Center have highlighted, the legal framework of immigration policing complements social animus toward Latinos and leads to a climate in which Latino immigrants in the U.S. South face widespread hostility, discrimination, and exploitation (Southern Poverty Law Center 2009, 2012). In the Charlotte case, the 287(g) program provides the most prominent example

of this conjunction of social and legal targeting of immigrants through a racial lens—with dire results for families separated by the provision's enforcement.

The 1996 Immigration Act contained a provision, section 287(g), that gave local law enforcement agencies authority to enforce immigration law. This part of the legislation was not implemented for several years as the federal government focused on a buildup of border security and deportations of immigrants with prior criminal convictions. However, by the early 2000s, several local county and municipal governments began to clamor for the federal government to allow them to participate in immigration enforcement. The 287(g) program, as it became known, gave local law enforcement a period of training (usually a week or so) in immigration law and then gave them authority to carry out stops where a person without proper documentation could be turned over to federal immigration authorities. The former sheriff of Mecklenburg County (where Charlotte is located), Jim Pendergraph, was one of the most vocal advocates of the program and succeeded in signing the first agreement with the federal government to implement the 287(g) program in Mecklenburg County in February 2006. As of February 2012, the 287(g) program in Charlotte had resulted in the deportation of 11,480 undocumented immigrants, with the vast majority being Mexican (7,238) and Central American (3,573) (Prieto 2012).[5] In Charlotte and other places in North Carolina, 287(g) was presented as a strategy to fight crime; authorities stressed that only certain individuals would be targeted—violent criminals, gang members, and drunk drivers—while hardworking, law-abiding immigrants would have nothing to fear (Nguyen and Gill 2010). The implementation of 287(g) was paired with state legislation that cracked down on "illegal" immigration by restricting services, such as the ability to get a driver's license, for undocumented residents. Checkpoints were set up, in theory at random, by police at major intersections where drivers had to present identification. Police pulled drivers over for minor traffic violations, such as illegal turns or expired tags, and if they did not have a license, then they could be arrested and eventually deported. In practice, many people who were detained and eventually deported were nonviolent offenders or had no criminal record whatsoever.[6] The language of fighting crime bled into the idea that all undocumented immigrants were "illegal" and thus criminal.

During 2009–2010, the Spanish-language newspapers were filled with reports of families separated by enforcement of the 287(g) program. Many immigrant families in Charlotte have members with varying legal status. The father may be undocumented, the mother a legal resident, and the children U.S. citizens. News stories reported wives and partners who did not hear from their husbands for several days, only to find out that they had been detained and deported. In one case, a Charlotte resident, Roberto Medina Martínez, was arrested under the 287(g) program for driving without a license.[7] After being transferred to Stewart Detention Center, an immigration detention facility in Georgia run by Corrections Corporation of America, he fell ill, was denied medical care, and died. Medina left behind a family with young children, and his death sparked protests by immigration reform activists. Many community members I spoke with worried about driving on major thoroughfares or about family members and friends who drove without valid licenses. Among Latinos in Charlotte, it was a widely accepted fact that police mainly set up checkpoints in Latino and black, working-class neighborhoods and neglected wealthier and whiter areas such as South Park.

This mistrust of the police was exacerbated by a series of incidents that came to light in the spring of 2010. An African American officer of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg police was arrested after several Latino immigrant women complained that he had sexually harassed and assaulted them during traffic stops.[8] According to the women, the officer threatened to take them into custody or turn them over to immigration if they did not consent to his advances to have sex with them. The women were undocumented and feared that their accusations could lead to deportation. The local Spanish-language radio station and several prominent attorneys were instrumental in ensuring their safety during the investigation.

In the weeks after the arrest of the police officer, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department hosted a series of town hall meetings in immigrant neighborhoods around the city.[9] These meetings were an attempt to assure community members that steps were being taken to ensure that police misconduct would not be tolerated and to improve relations between immigrant communities and the police department. Attending an evening meeting at a church on Central Avenue, I sat in an audience of Latino and Asian immigrants as the police commis-

sioner addressed the room. He introduced himself and then a row of about twenty officers standing behind him. Then the audience was split into two groups: English- and Spanish-speaking residents. I joined the Spanish-speaking group, where several bilingual officers were taking questions. No one brought up the accused officer, but several people asked about the 287(g) program. A few community members were concerned that the police department engaged in racial profiling of Latino residents, pulling neighbors and friends over and arresting them for drunk driving or having an expired license. While adamant that no racial profiling occurred, one officer flippantly responded that Latinos made profiling more likely by modifying their trucks with airbrushed Mexican flags and the names of their home provinces in Mexico. A Latina journalist who I ran into at the event remarked that the meeting reflected an ongoing public relations strategy that the department had engaged in for years and that nothing had really changed in terms of the antagonistic relationship between the Latino community and police.[10]

In addition to providing legal assistance to many families facing separation because of immigration policing, staff at the Latin American Coalition decided that more needed to be done to support these families and advocate on their behalf. The result was "Familias Unidas," a series of biweekly meetings where families, concerned community members, and activists from several local nonprofits meet to discuss issues related to ongoing cases.[11] The group provides a space where individuals facing deportation can tell their stories and receive emotional support from others facing similar situations. As "Familias Unidas" got off the ground, the heart-wrenching stories shared during sessions became part of online campaigns led by the Coalition and Action NC to gather petition signatures against their deportations. The group also organized rallies that gathered community support and focused attention (particularly press coverage) on individuals' cases and the fact that their deportation would leave children and spouses alone in the United States. In one prominent case, Isaide Serrano, a Mexican immigrant with six children, who was detained during a traffic stop in 2010 after living for twenty-one years in the United States with no criminal record, was required by a judge to attend her immigration hearing even though it was scheduled for five hours after she gave birth in a Charlotte hospital.[12] She ended up being granted a stay as the judge cancelled her deportation order.

Another result of "Familias Unidas" was the production of a full-length documentary film, *From the Back of the Line* (Shearer, Levinson, and Bellmas 2013), which highlights the stories of several of the families participating in the group. As Armando Bellmas, one of the producers of the film and communications director at the Coalition, relayed, the individuals featured in the film are "normal people like me, but going through this 'thing.'"[13] After several sessions he attended, Armando found himself more invested in the families' lives; he began to see them not just as clients, but as friends. He helped make the film so that their stories, and those of hundreds of other families whose situation isn't publicized, get told. After premiering in May 2013, the movie has been shown at several regional film festivals. But what has become evident to the filmmakers is the need to update the film as deportation cases drag on and shifts in immigration policy—such as pending federal immigration reform—occur.

Taken together, the cases highlighted by Charlotte's Spanish-language newspapers, "Familias Unidas," and *From the Back of the Line* reveal the extent to which immigration policing has taken on a racial pallor and punitive tone. It seems no coincidence that many of the individuals caught up in deportation proceedings because of traffic stops are brown-skinned Mexicans and Central Americans (I met several lighter-skinned Mexicans who did not face such police scrutiny). Moreover, the political marginalization and social denigration of "Mexicans" have created a climate where a black police officer feels he can take sexual advantage of immigrant women with impunity. Was this just one bad apple, or does it point to a larger uneasiness in black-brown relations in Charlotte?

Although the immigration reform movement has fostered ties with national groups like the NAACP, local collaborations between Latino and African American activists are feeble. The Latin American Coalition has partnered with a few black churches to host immigration reform rallies, but a broader coalition appears stunted. Many immigrant activists speak of the Civil Rights movement with reverence; they are inspired by nonviolent tactics like sit-ins and have co-opted strategies to organize protest and marches from the earlier movement. On Facebook and other social networking sites, activists share Civil Rights movement–era texts like Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963) as a way to instill pride and confidence in activists who get arrested during

sit-ins in Washington, DC. Despite the parallels between the tactics of civil disobedience, student leaders point out that immigration reform is not the "civil rights" issue of our time because they acknowledge that the Civil Rights movement is ongoing—particularly with recent reversals to the Voting Rights Act, prominent cases of structural violence targeting black youth (such as New York City's stop-and-frisk policy), and a disproportionately incarcerated population. In addition, many immigration activists point to other sources of inspiration, such as the women's rights and gay rights movements, or the Chicano student movement and labor struggles of the United Farm Workers. Yet the message of solidarity for immigration reform seems unconvincing to many African Americans in Charlotte. Despite the support of some community leaders, few African Americans participate as rank-and-file marchers in immigration reform rallies. And despite outward appearances, many Afro-Latinos in Charlotte feel little solidarity with black residents, instead focusing their community-making efforts in collaboration with fellow Latinos, particularly Mexicans. However, solidarity does appear to be growing between Latino activists and Vietnamese and Laotian immigrants. Members of the Asian immigrant community recently founded the Southeast Asian Coalition to help advocate for individuals facing deportation and police profiling similar to those in the Latino population. As a small nonprofit, it shares office space and logistical support with the Latin American Coalition and has collaborated in organizing marches to advocate for reform.

So what does being "Mexican" in Charlotte mean? I place the term in quotation marks because of the ambiguity and shifting meaning of the term as it is deployed by whites, blacks, and Latinos. (Actual) Mexican immigrants in Charlotte approach their Mexican identity with pride but apprehension. They proudly display Mexican flags and retain linguistic and cultural ties to Mexico, while asserting a diasporic identity through Mexican institutions and businesses in Charlotte. But they are well aware of the negative perceptions of "Mexicans" in the United States and worry about how to become "American" in a place where their labor is welcome but their culture and language are not. Two contrasting examples highlight this ambiguity. At the Fanta Festival, *regional mexicano* bands play to enthusiastic audiences who display their Mexican identity proudly through flags, cowboy hats with Mexican state names etched in

the hatbands, and call-and-response *gritos* between the band and audience. At immigration reform marches, however, great care is taken to de-stress Mexican (and other Latin American national) identity: marchers are asked to display only U.S. flags and to wear uniform outfits (such as white T-shirts). March organizers stress the "American" qualities of Latino immigrants: DREAM students who were brought here as children and didn't know that being undocumented would disqualify them from college, families with U.S. citizen children who face separation because of deportation proceedings, hard workers looking for a path to citizenship. Though starkly different, these two examples show the delicate balancing act that many Mexican (and Latina/o) immigrants live daily—a duality of being Mexican and becoming American, part of both worlds.

I have observed yet another layer of complexity in this duality. Some non-Mexican Latino immigrants feel a strong solidarity with Mexicans and look to some aspects of Mexican identity as a way to explain their precarious situation as working-class immigrants, in effect becoming "Mexican"—at least through performance or friendship. Since being "Mexican" has taken on a negative connotation in Charlotte, these individuals differ markedly from the many Latinos who move to disassociate themselves from cultural markers of *mexicanidad*, such as several Charlotte musicians' distaste for *regional mexicano*. The most prominent example of solidarity with Mexicans is the rock band Dorian Gris (see chapter 3). The Ecuadorian musicians in Dorian Gris, through friendships, musical performances, and their experiences laboring in service sector occupations, have developed a deep association with urban Mexican working-class culture and feel a powerful responsibility to properly convey this sense to their (primarily Mexican) audience. The concept of *el sueño gris*, which I have borrowed from Dorian Gris's incomplete dream of becoming a successful band, conveys the haltered ambitions of a generation of Latino immigrants to Charlotte who have encountered limitations to their financial and social integration into the U.S. mainstream. That Latina/o immigrants are becoming "Mexican," with its associated negative connotations, shows a further evolution of the "graying" dream: with pathways to citizenship clogged and immigrants criminalized, some Latinos look to "Mexican" identity as an oppositional frame to mainstream American and whitening Latino identities.

The importance of being "Mexican" in Charlotte is part of a context where musicians hold discussions and engage in musical collaborations that position them in relation to emerging racial constructions as part of southern *latinidad*. Carlos Crespo, the lead guitarist of Dorian Gris, struggles with the cognitive dissonance of his multiple racial and ethnic affiliations. While he identifies strongly with his Mexican friends and fans, as a light-skinned Ecuadorian of middle-class background, Crespo also participates in debates about whiteness and *latinidad*. Crespo struggles to define his identity in a U.S. urban context where race and class are paramount. His phenotype and middle-class upbringing in Ecuador facilitate friendships with "white" Latinos who frequent coffee shops, listen to indie rock, and attend art gallery openings. Yet Crespo also performs shows in Eastside venues with Dorian Gris, hangs out at his friends' homes in working-class apartment complexes, and tries to make ends meet as a poorly paid worker. Although many immigrants pointed out the incompatibility of Latin American and U.S. concepts of race, stressing their hybrid *latinidad* over a particular racial category, Crespo attempts to resolve the contradictions of a lived reality of race as a Latino immigrant in Charlotte through his questioning of whiteness and affiliation with *mexicanidad*.

Bakalao Stars' 2010 album, *Soundcocho*, provides an example of black-brown collaboration through its recording of "Gitana" with the local reggae singer Ras Congo, a Jamaican immigrant to Charlotte. Christian Anzola, the band's drummer, had played previously with Ras Congo in the band Roots Essentials. In an interview with Bakalao Stars and Ras Congo backstage before the album release party, I asked them what it was like to record a song together.[14] A song by the Argentine band Los Fabulosos Cadillacs was on the stereo, and Ras Congo started by declaring the common threads between Jamaican reggae and Los Fabulosos' music. Then he explained how even though Bakalao Stars' members were from a different culture, they had the "same heart." When he started to rehearse for the album and subsequent live performances, Ras Congo noticed how the band put "spirit in [making music]," how they weren't just showing off, but putting "soul in it" and forming a bond through music. For their part, Bakalao Stars members noted how collaborating with Ras Congo brought their music to a different level, not only through his intensive knowledge of reggae and ska music, but also by

spreading "good vibes" with his enthusiastic presence. The intent of the album was to show how "Caribbeans" (by which they mean both Spanish- and English-speaking islanders) and Latinos share musical "feeling" and "flavor." While the collaboration with Ras Congo acknowledged and maintained the band's connection to Afro-Caribbean "roots" music, the album's artwork presented a pan-Latino image of the brightly decorated buses common in many Latin American countries flanked by audio speakers and pictures of the band members. According to the band, the album's music was meant to reflect this pan-Latino theme through its mixture of genres and rhythms. Thus, *Soundcocho* was a way to stay true to the band's Afro-Caribbean roots through its collaborations, while also exploring themes related to being Latino in Charlotte by juxtaposing Latin American musical styles.

The problem of race in the larger Charlotte music scene is central and vexing. As we have seen, even within the Latin music scene stark geographic segregation keeps musicians and fans in the dark about developments in parallel genres (chapter 3). The divisions between the Latin music scene and other scenes catering to whites and African Americans is oftentimes just as sharp; there is a general ignorance about what is going on in a different musical community—or even on a different night at the same club. As an outside observer, I travelled between these different worlds with relative ease, but it appears that most residents of Charlotte fail to traverse these social boundaries. One limitation, in the opinion of musicians and promoters of all races, seems to be the underdeveloped music scene in general, particularly in relation to Charlotte's size as a metropolitan area. A recent article in the *Charlotte Observer* (Reed 2013) mirrored what I often heard stated by Latino musicians: that Charlotte was not a primary destination for touring bands, and the lack of consistent concerts hurts local musicians too. Another limitation seems to be a dearth of radio stations playing local music, unlike smaller cities like Chapel Hill, Asheville, or Athens, Georgia, which have prominent college radio stations. But ignorance of what is out there, especially when segmented media of Spanish- and English-language radio and newspapers only cover limited genres of music, makes the music scene appear more parochial than it really is. Certain journalists, promoters, and organizations have made efforts to change this—*Creative Loafing Charlotte*'s coverage of Latin music under the editorship of Mark Kemp

or the Latin American Coalition's marketing campaign for "A Night in Rio"—but overall it seems this type of music exchange has stalled.

Although Charlotte's Latino population has an antagonistic relationship with local police, highlighted by high-profile incidents such as those above, many musicians stressed the relative tranquility of Charlotte. In their experience, fewer examples of racism and discriminatory behavior toward Latinos occurred in Charlotte than in other places, particularly rural areas in nearby states. Some of this perceived lack of racism could be attributed to personal factors that differentiate musicians from the general Latino community—higher rates of legal status, bilingualism, access (to clubs, backstage areas), higher income levels, and increased visibility—leading to fewer individual experiences of racist behavior. Also, musicians may tend to downplay portrayals of local racism because they want to put a positive spin on their involvement in the music scene in Charlotte. The grass is sometimes greener at home; everyday forms of racism may not be as recognizable or mentionable as more blatant examples of overt racist behavior that some musicians reported having experienced elsewhere. This perception of Charlotte as a relative haven from racism and discrimination aimed at Latinos contributes to a sense of civic pride and belonging that some musicians express for the city and for Latino community institutions like the Latin American Coalition. For example, during an interview conducted in Spanish, the local music promoter Gonzalo Pérez launched into an intriguing monologue when asked about his experience with racism in the U.S. South:

> In Charlotte, there really isn't that much racism . . . there are one, two or three [cases of racism], but look, places we have gone to: Virginia, Ohio. Wow, I could tell you some stories about that! . . .
>
> I'm going to tell you one experience, my own experience. We went to Tennessee, came to a McDonald's, and I stepped off, well, I have black features—and when the guys got off the bus, the people who were there started mocking us and in the McDonald's, the area where we sat emptied out, everybody changed their seat. We didn't eat, we left and got out of there, and five minutes later the police stopped us, [asking,] "What were you doing in that McDonald's, where did you come from, and where are you going?" And they searched the bus inside and out, they searched everything top to bottom. That was an act of racism.

> Yes, I eventually told the police officer let us go because I began to have strong words with him. I said, "I'm going to make a claim of racial discrimination, because you are doing something unjust." And that was the only reason he let us go.[15]

In recounting the experiences he has had traveling with Banda TecnoCaliente around the U.S. South and Midwest, Pérez contrasts Charlotte as a relative haven from racism compared to Virginia or Ohio, where he perceives racist behavior to be much more prevalent. Pérez's account has an air of bravado: as someone who speaks passable English, is secure in his legal status, and is in charge of the band, he confronted the police officer and threatened to make a complaint. He becomes an advocate for the Mexican band members, drawing on a body of experience traveling with previous bands to resolve the situation and get the band on the road again. As a touring band, TecnoCaliente sees such experiences with racism as part of the risk of traveling. They endure and even resist such hardships—actions that help them deepen their understanding of the experience of mobile and migratory immigrant laborers who make up their main audience.

Continuing with his commentary, Pérez goes into greater detail about how he envisions Latino immigrants as belonging to the city of Charlotte:

> But here, at least in Charlotte really [racism] has mostly stopped, which is why it's peaceful. The American that can give you a hand gives you one. Like the Mexicans say, the *gabacho* gets along well with us.
>
> I'm one of those who advises the Mexicans to work for [the benefit of] the state: "Don't send all your money to Mexico, it's a mistake, keep some of it here."
>
> Mexicans earn one hundred dollars, and send ninety to Mexico. [Instead,] invest in your city, [a city] that gives you schools, gives you help, your children have good hospitals, they have everything, so invest here. Mexicans are really good [people], good laborers . . . if one invests here, they [the city] will give them more support, the institutions are going to back them with more force, and say, "Look, she is illegal, but she bought a house, he is paying taxes to the government, he is illegal but his children are professionals, he has a car and pays taxes." Understand? If we did all

> that, if we didn't blow it in wanting to only take from the city, and not invest, the city would go to pieces.
>
> We have to take money and reinvest it in the city. I, the Dominican that I am, sold all my properties in my country and I am concentrating here. I take here and I spend here. I'm not able to just take and not spend. What would be left of the city? It's like if you work and work and they don't pay you [*laughs*], you will die. This happens with a city, the city has to be cared for—you have to fight for this city because the people owe it. It's not as if everybody is not giving, there are many who help, here people, the Mexican knows that if your child is born here, you have help with your [WIC] coupons, your Medicaid, the house here where we are at [Latin American Coalition] helps people a lot, with [learning] English, if one needs a lawyer they will look for one for you, because they invest in you here, we are going to work for [the benefit of] the city. That's the only thing that I don't approve of in our community, and not only, I say, it's more Mexicans than others. They are the majority [of Latinos] here.[16]

Pérez's commentary becomes an analysis of the relationship between the Latino immigrant community and the nation-state. In a somewhat stereotypical and chauvinistic manner, he advises Mexicans to be strategic about using their money, by investing in Charlotte and their local community rather than sending remittances back to Mexico. If "illegal" immigrants stake a claim to belonging in the city and invest as community members in its well-being (financially and socially) through legitimate, above-board activities like paying taxes, owning property, and having children who are "professionals" (i.e., well-educated, English-speaking, with middle-class jobs in the formal economy), then the institutions of the state (and civil society organizations like the Latin American Coalition) will be more likely to acknowledge that immigrants have a stake and say in the city's future.[17]

What is intriguing about Pérez's argument is the way it positions Mexicans and the Latino immigrant community as political actors who have important decisions to make that will determine their future. Opposing both advocates of harsher immigration laws and immigrants who themselves desire a transnational existence, Pérez advances a *realpolitik* that acknowledges what is already fact—that most Latino immigrants to Charlotte are unlikely to return to their native countries and have

strong ties to community in the city.[18] Despite recent legislation targeting undocumented immigrants, mass deportations are improbable for economic and political reasons. Although immigration has slowed and some migrants have returned to their sending countries during the recent economic recession (Papademetriou, Sumption, and Terrazas 2011; Passel and Cohn 2011), most immigrants already in the United States have decided to stay, for steadier work, because they have children who are U.S. citizens, or because the border crossing is too perilous and expensive. These trends have contributed to place-based community formation, even among immigrants who were formerly very mobile, such as migrant workers who decide to move to cities such as Charlotte for more regular work.

The state as it exists along multiple scales (city, county, state, and federal) plays a major part in this politics around immigration. Although much of the publicity focuses on actions that are anti-immigrant, such as recent legislation passed in Arizona, Utah, and Georgia that targets undocumented immigration, in reality, the state should be seen as encompassing multiple interests that at time pursue complementary and contradictory paths. Much of the vitriol and anti-immigrant legislative efforts have centered on the rights of immigrants to participate in government-funded, -regulated, or -mandated activities that signal participation in society, such as driver's licenses, public education, benefits to the poor, and above-board employment. Yet while police and regulatory agencies may curb undocumented immigrants' rights to these activities, other government agencies, such as health, human services, or education, may include undocumented immigrants in activities, either through the participation of family members who are legal residents or U.S. citizens (particularly, U.S.-born children) or participating directly despite their undocumented status because of federal antidiscrimination mandates (such as for public primary education). The work of the state to include undocumented immigrants acknowledges their de facto membership in the community, city, and state, even if legally their role is circumscribed.

In another light, Pérez's argument provides a critique of neoliberalism and its negative effects on cities. This corresponds to the pervasiveness of market ideology in current political thinking, and the ways people fashion political speech on the local scale (see Holland et al. 2007). The

disinvestment in urban infrastructure and social services that first came to a head in the 1970s in New York City's fiscal crisis (O'Connor 1973; Harvey 1973, 1989; Gordon 1978; Susser 1982) is described succinctly: "What would be left of the city?," in relation to what could happen in Charlotte. However, rather than see this collapse as a result of governmental austerity and structural adjustment, Pérez sees it as a consequence of individuals shirking their civic duty to reinvest in their local government (through paying taxes), neighborhoods, and civic institutions. Immigrants are responsible for their own well-being and that of the city. Interestingly, recent studies of several U.S. cities lends support for the idea that immigration (spurring ethnic entrepreneurship and immigrant consumption) and concurrent population growth has been a major (if not *the* major) source of economic growth, particularly in places with declining or aging native-born populations (Fayde 2007; Michigan Future 2003; Fiscal Policy Institute 2009). As Pérez's argument develops, he turns to a decidedly anti-neoliberal stance on the role of the state: government agencies have provided social benefits to the immigrant community, therefore immigrants should pay taxes and fight for a government that erects more of a social safety net and expands rights and access for all.

Conclusion

Over fifty years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington, the United States still faces problems of racial inequality and injustice. Despite the gains of the Civil Rights movement, places like Charlotte face a retrenchment of racial segregation in housing and schools and the emergence of new forms of racism against immigrants and other minorities. The racial project of the contemporary South is one of "racism without race" (Mullings 2005; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003) that couches discriminatory practices and bigotry in the language of law and order—targeting immigrants because of their "illegality" and perceived-to-be inassimilable culture. The vehemence of anti-immigrant activism and the apparatus of immigration enforcement efforts create a revanchist atmosphere where families are separated, neighborhoods are on lockdown, and people fear traveling across town or out of state. This "borderlands condition" that

exempts Latino immigrants (and in other places African and Middle Eastern immigrants) from fair treatment and a right to livelihood—part of an "exceptional" state that has long existed on the U.S.-Mexico border (Rosas 2006; Inda 2006)—has now spread to cities and small towns across the United States that face an immigration "problem." That immigration is a problem—causing overcrowded public schools, traffic fatalities, low-wage job competition, or a loss of "American" values—speaks to the pervasiveness of this racial project. However, like the onset of Jim Crow segregation, this developing system is incomplete and uneven, and thus can be challenged and even defeated. Will the problem of the twenty-first century be the problem of a brown color line?

For Latino immigrants to Charlotte, dealing with race has meant pursuing two parallel and intertwined strategies. First, they have created a sense of southern *latinidad* that, while developing as part of an ethnic identity, exists in concert with an awareness of race and racism in both Latin America and the U.S. South. Searching for a pan-Latino identity can be seen as a response to the general denigration of Latino immigrants, a way to form community as immigrants in a new place, or an extension of already nascent connections between outward-looking people from their home countries. But for many immigrants, being Latino in Charlotte also means being southern, and by expressing this identity they stake a claim to belonging to the region and the nation. Second, because of the specific targeting of "Mexicans" in anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy, Latinos in Charlotte assess race through the prism of how they position themselves in relation to being "Mexican." As we have seen, being "Mexican" does not always mean one is a Mexican national, but rather that one identifies with the racial, social, and economic marginalization that now accompanies the term.

Music plays a vital role in southern *latinidad*, both because of the representational qualities of genre that distill identity into performance and aesthetics and because of the power music has to help audiences form a sense of solidarity and community. Because of their experiences touring outside Charlotte, many musicians see the city as a haven from other, more racist areas of the U.S. South. Music also can be a pathway to interracial collaboration, as the case of Bakalao Stars partnering with Ras Congo demonstrates. Music is part of a larger dream they share with their audience of interracial harmony and opportunity for aspiring

immigrants like themselves. However, as I argue in this chapter and elsewhere in this book, the dream has been graying because of the harshness of immigration policing, economic stagnation, and social segregation in the city.

Political organizing, such as the campaigns led by the Latin American Coalition, has arisen in response to the anti-immigrant climate and racialization of "Mexicans" in Charlotte. "Familias Unidas" deals with the aftermath of racial profiling in immigration policing by counseling families on legal questions and providing emotional support. DREAM activists confront authorities head-on through marches and sit-ins at politicians' offices. Both types of campaigns provide avenues for identity formation, but also have to deal with the question of race. Through political organizing there is much potential—to galvanize a generation of young activists to pursue a lifetime of advocacy and public service, to bridge organizational divides between Latino immigrant groups and other immigrant activists, to provide a balm for the anxiety and hurt of potential family separations, or to provide powerful narratives that will encourage support across racial lines for immigration reform and the social integration of immigrants into the mainstream. But as chapter 5 shows, many musicians and other Latino residents of Charlotte find overt political participation to be problematic. It remains to be seen whether musicians and political activists can find a way to overcome skepticism and hesitancy on the part of many to participate in what appears to be a lengthy struggle.