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

By Patricia Silver

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In *Sunbelt Diaspora*, Patricia Silver uses rich ethnographic detail to document the growth and complexity of the Puerto Rican community in Orlando, Florida. Employing participant observation, interviews, and oral histories, she examines “how these and other divergent experiences of race, class, and place affect collective identifications and political practices in the Orlando area” (p. 9). She shows how the Puerto Rican community went through a process of being invisible prior to the 1980s, to a community that struggles for representation on their own terms. She documents the heterogeneity of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Orlando, including class, race, and differences based on place of origin, and how these distinct features come together in a community that engages in placemaking to stake a claim of political visibility and clout in the region. Her book culminates in a thorough analysis of how different communities jockeyed for position in the 2011 redistricting process that reproduced existing racial and ethnic concentrations of people, as well as class hierarchies and inequalities.

Part One examines the demography and geography of Latinos/as and introduces politics into this context. Chapter One examines the “materiality of place” (p. 33) and how space is transformed into places of belonging that carry meaning for Latinos/as and Puerto Ricans at the same time as these groups fight for recognition to achieve political gains for equitable representation. In the context of this discussion, Silver shows the growth of the Puerto Rican population by examining the four counties that make up the Orlando metropolitan area as well as how variations in racial identifications and class can lead to patterns of political community formation. In this context, the inclusion of Latinos/as into the political landscape of the area is examined, as well as the dilemma of how party and ethnicity can clash.

Chapter Two examines the broader context of Orlando and locates Puerto Ricans and Latinos/as in this context. This chapter examines Puerto Ricans' history of migration to the region and how changes involving neoliberalism and color-blind multiculturalism intersect to define the particularities of this region as the context in which Puerto Ricans have historically integrated. Silver discusses Orlando's transformation that would challenge the legacy of Jim Crow segregation by positioning Orlando to be a multicultural, color-blind place, at the same time acknowledging that this recognition of difference did not necessarily subvert local power structures. It is this context in which Puerto Ricans integrate as "racial/colonial subjects" (p. 66), bringing with them memories of previous places that created social division between island and diaspora Puerto Ricans. Silver shows how island Puerto Ricans deflected the stigma of Nuyoricans through the trope of professional migration discourses. Ultimately, as Orlando was transformed from a small southern town to an international city, *Latinidad* in general was commodified as part of a process of color-blind multiculturalism being infused into the prevailing "natural" neoliberal ideology that "privileges individualism, and a political economic regime that promotes privatization and values competition" (pp. 72–3). The outcome of this fused ideology is a "multicultural neoliberalism" in which the city dons the semblance of inclusivity while reinscribing ethnic, racial, and class hierarchies. This is the backdrop in which determining the shape and context of voting districts embodied a new mechanism that entrenched racial, ethnic, and political relations in local spaces, leaving the growing Latino/a population in the area largely invisible in this emerging political landscape.

Part Two uses oral histories and ethnographic data to illustrate how in the second half of the Twentieth Century, Orlando natives viewed Puerto Ricans as a group and how this group, in turn, responded to those stereotypes. Before the 1980s, Puerto Ricans in Orlando were largely invisible and did not fit the stereotypes that were prevalent throughout the country. However, despite blending with whites, Puerto Ricans did not feel that they were viewed as equals. It is in the 1980s that growing attention turns to the presence of Puerto Ricans in the area, pivoting from invisible to hypervisible—a group that was considered to be outsiders and foreign—separating them from Blacks and Whites. Language (the use of Spanish) and the racializa-

tion of language only increased this hypervisibility. Discourse emphasizing class differences only served to further divide the Latino/a political community. However, in the 1990s, Silver argues that a collective Puerto Rican and Latino/a identity emerged, resulting in claims-making in which these groups sought recognition and legitimacy. She discusses how the collective identification process relies on memory. Moreover, many of these memories are translocal, drawing from different places and different times, informing local place-making practices. As part of the process of constructing belonging on their own terms, substantive and legal citizenship, as well as other forms of citizenship, were invoked as a way to claim legitimacy in the face of exclusion. This involved laying claims to space, engaging in local political activities to draw attention to the community's fight for recognition, and laying the groundwork for collective memory, rooted in their local community, to infuse a growing Latino/a political consciousness.

Chapter Five documents how despite the gains of the 1990s, the first decade of the Twenty-First century was one of dispossession that resulted in Puerto Ricans and Latinos/as feeling invisible again. Nonetheless, Silver identifies places in Orlando that felt like home and where connections were made among the members of Puerto Rican and Latino/a communities. Much of this placemaking, Silver argues, represents collective and participatory forms of citizenship and belonging. However, within this context, Latinos/as still exhibited low voting rates and alienation from both political parties, which the author attributes to the superficial attention directed at these communities as well as local practices that thwarted civic engagement. She focuses on the latter and the multiple ways in which local politics blocked Latino/a and Puerto Rican participation. In short, just as Latinos/as and Puerto Ricans were finding their footing in the local landscapes of Orlando, the backlash from Whites led to growing feelings of displacement and dispossession, which were solidified in the 2011 redistricting process.

Part Three focuses on the redistricting case in Orange County. Chapter Six hones in on the local Orange County redistricting in the early 2010s. Specifically, Silver documents the struggles of Puerto Ricans and Latinos/as for representation in, and equal access to, this process. Silver examines the tensions between collective identification and the sources of differentiation that upend the potential for mobilization to confront the disenfran-

chisement of these groups in this process. In particular, local representatives that were gatekeepers of the redistricting process homogenized Latinos/as, engaged in practices of “exclusionary inclusion” (p. 183), and in the process, sowed the seeds of discord that reinforced ethnic hierarchies and kept Latinos/as from mobilizing their full potential as a unified block. The results diminished Latino/a voting power.

Chapter Seven takes a deeper dive into the redistricting process and also examines the lawsuit that challenged its results, leveraging the concepts introduced in earlier chapters. Silver examines the technologies of the map-making process that reproduced local racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies. She draws attention to the importance placed on keeping “communities of interest” (p. 192) together, though race and ethnicity were rejected as constituting a community of interest. In the examination of this process, Silver highlights how Whites co-opted the discourse of equal opportunity to maintain racial and ethnic inequalities utilizing colorblind discourse. These technologies of map making combined with the tenets of redistricting—compactness, contiguity, and communities of interest—assured that a Latino/a majority minority district would prove unlikely to materialize. This outcome reinforced the history of discrimination that kept Latinos/as from political participation.

Silver concludes her book with a discussion of how neoliberalism and color-blind multiculturalism combine to raise questions about access, visibility, and representation in Orlando and the implications of exclusionary inclusion for the future of the Puerto Rican and Latino/a communities in the area. Moreover, Silver includes an Epilogue in which she posits that post-2015 events such as the migration of Puerto Ricans after Hurricane Maria solidified “Orlando’s place in the Puerto Rican diaspora and the Puerto Rican and by extension Latino place in Orlando” (p. 227). In addition, since the redistricting case, Silver highlights that Puerto Ricans have gained greater representation in local, state, and federal governments.

Silver’s ethnography is brought to life by excerpts from oral histories from several oral history collections. Hearing the voices of Puerto Ricans themselves tell of their struggles for representation and equity is a powerful component of her book. She immersed herself in the ethnoscape of Puerto Rican Orlando, and wove into her account her observations of political pro-

cesses she observed firsthand, with rich ethnographic detail making readers feel like they were personally present at County Board meetings. Silver combines her approach to storytelling with a sociological and anthropological analysis of color-blind multiculturalism in a neoliberal city. Her analysis reveals that the austerity measures that many Puerto Ricans left through migration to Orlando were reproducing themselves in Orlando, through neoliberal policies in a city that claimed to be a color-blind mecca for those who purportedly were willing to work hard enough and expend the maximum effort to get ahead. This individualist discourse of hard work overshadowed the inequities Puerto Ricans and other Latinos/as experienced that were historical and structural in nature.

Although Silver discussed racial identification differences within the Puerto Rican community in earlier chapters of the book, in the discussion of redistricting one wonders about colorism in Puerto Ricans' and Latinos/as' claims for representation. An area for future examination is how colorism and class intersect to shape the intra-Latino/a hierarchies she uncovers in her work. That said, Silver discusses how the discourse of professional Puerto Rican migration served as a tool to whitewash the migration of Puerto Ricans, known as Nuyoricans, to Orlando from the Northeast given the stereotypes associated with this group. Aside from one remark about how the northeastern Puerto Ricans came to be known as those who protested "loud," it is unclear how these divisions between diaspora and island-born Puerto Ricans played out in the redistributing debate, which much of the book focuses on.

Overall, Sunbelt Diaspora is an extremely well-written and insightful book about Puerto Ricans in Orlando, Florida, the state with the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans stateside. It is also a compelling account of the Puertoricanization of Orlando, how this has meshed with the larger Latino/a community, and the politics of race, ethnicity, class, and place in determining political representation amidst widespread demographic changes in a southern town. This is a must read for scholars of Puerto Rican migration and diasporic communities as well as race and ethnic relations.