



## Sunbelt diaspora: Race, class, and Latino politics in Puerto Rican Orlando

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Reviewing books is an essential part of an academic's workload. Yet, few books are entrenched in your immediate place of livelihood and work. For years I have been expecting the release of Patricia Silver's book. In the last decade or so, the study of the growing Puerto Rican population in Central Florida has received significant scholarly attention. This interest has peaked after several events on the island—including the well-known economic and financial struggles to the island economy that were exacerbated by the impacts of Hurricane Maria and recent seismic events—events that have influenced the movement of Puerto Ricans to Florida, particularly the Central Florida region, and will impact the discussion of race, class, and politics in Puerto Rican Orlando.

In *Sunbelt Diaspora: Race, Class, and Latino Politics in Puerto Rican Orlando*, Patricia Silver's ethnographic work explores the process of integration for Puerto Ricans in Orlando. Drawing from sociological and anthropological theories of race, Silver explores the boundaries of integration and self-identification of Puerto Ricans in the black-white racial dichotomy of the South. In the shadows of theme parks, the recent prevalence of Jim Crow laws in the segregated South is often forgotten. Where Latinos, particularly Puerto Ricans, fall in this dichotomy remains as complicated as ever. But Silver's work provides some insights for understanding this issue.

Silver situates neoliberalism as a conduit for the relaxed regulations, limited taxes, and few labor rights that led to the growth of the Sunbelt region as a favorable destination to live and work. Silver argues that neoliberal multiculturalism and Latinization has promoted individualism and colorblindness, at the expense of the historical collective Latino political histories of race and class actions.

To explore this issue, Silver immersed herself in the field during the redistricting process in Central Florida—the redrawing of political districts that takes place after

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each centennial census—and the battle for Puerto Rican political representation in the region, an exercise in power that proved to be an astute avenue for understanding the politics of race, class, and ethnicity in the region.

Silver discusses the complexities of the Puerto Rican experience in Orlando, an experience grounded in the idea of advancing Puerto Rican power that seems to be constantly contested by inner conflicts and the calculated inclusion/exclusion of other non-Puerto Rican groups with access to power. Although Puerto Ricans in Orlando have shifted from periods of invisibility to periods of hypervisibility, they still have to contend with the exclusion that results from the view of them, from American people, as perpetually foreign. But Puerto Ricans in Orlando have fought this image in their own terms and have used remembering as a tool to form and reshape their identity and political power. That process is complicated and has resulted in significant tensions in collective identification. Silver analyzes these tensions through the term the *balde de jueyes*, a term that roughly translates to a bucket of crabs, with the significance that, if crabs work together, they can either help each other to climb out of the bucket or they can fight each other and remain in it. Is a powerful analogy that captures the process by which some groups are excluded and some included in the distribution of political power in the region under the guise of multicultural neoliberalism.

Silver's work is a must-read for those interested in the history of Latinos and Puerto Ricans in Florida. It provides an excellent geographical overview of the places that have attracted Puerto Ricans and other Latinos over decades, particular the East Side of Orange County. It captures the complexity of the intersection of different racial/ethnic identities, class relations, and memories of place. Although these negotiations have resulted in significant gains in seats of power for Puerto Rican candidates in the region, the issues are by far not settled. Voter registration campaigns are going to continue, and the potential Puerto Rican political power is going to be sought out, as witnessed in the courting of Puerto Rican voters in the past presidential election. Yet, the resulting conversations on who will be excluded, who will be included, and under what guise, remains. Patricia's work is crucial for understanding these issues and also of essential value for understanding the next redistricting process in Orlando.

The important lessons contained in this book are going to be vital for understanding the process by which the continuous resettlement of Puerto Ricans to less traditional Latino destinations such as Georgia, the Carolinas, and elsewhere are going to impact their identity, social inclusion, and political power. Whether they will escape from or remain in the *balde de jueyes* remains to be seen.

