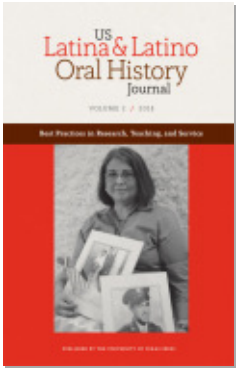
Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South by John D. Márquez (review)



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doing antiracism work and work on class, which nobody was doing at that time. . . . And I believe the political, the personal is political. I wanted to reach out to other women who were different and to see where I fit and Califia was really diverse" (130). From these two interviews of Latina participants, one may infer that there was genuine growth in the antiracist pedagogical efforts of Califia.

Clark Pomerleau in *Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism* has documented the history of a feminist community in California that tried to teach and empower its members to combat sexism, classism, and racism. Through its consciousness-raising feminist workshops, conferences, and summer camps, Califia attempted to create social change through the education of its members. It is a book of interest to historians, feminist scholars, practitioners of oral history, and to Latina/o and other scholars of color interested in learning of coalitions and activism across racial, gender, ethnic, and class distinctions.

Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South

by John D. Márquez
University of Texas Press. 2013.
285 pages. paper $27.95.
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REVIEWED BY MARIO N. CASTRO-VILLARREAL

The subjects of activism and the preservation of oral histories in communities of color have remained central to the preoccupations of ethnic studies over the past forty years. And yet much less ink has been spilled regarding the development of interracial coalitions between minority groups. Nonetheless, this understudied subject is rapidly becoming a field of research in its own right, and *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*, by John D. Márquez, signals a major shift in the methodological and geographical scope of this nascent area of ethnic studies.

Focusing on Baytown, an industrial city in the greater Houston area, and in close proximity to the Louisiana border, Márquez describes in vivid detail his upbringing as a dark-skinned Mexican American in a space marked by over a century of antiblack violence and police brutality. In the lengthy introduction, the author describes his alienation from his family's Chicano roots, an identity that he embraced only after he left Baytown for California, and his hybrid experience as a Latino teen living in a black working-class community. Utilizing an interdisciplinary methodology (anthropology,

archival research, cultural hybridity theory, ethnic studies, and decolonial knowledge), Márquez criticizes the tendency of academia to compartmentalize the racist oppression of communities of color. According to Márquez, the focus on interracial conflict and notions that nonblack minorities benefit from systemic whiteness created "something of a cottage industry" (26) in the humanities, reducing the role that white supremacy had in shaping spaces like Baytown, to insulate nonwhite populations from one another. Márquez asserts that white supremacy should not be understood as isolated historical events but as a continuum of violent structures set to maintain racial purity and social order.

Márquez connects the past and present of Baytown through two key concepts: the "racial state of expendability" (44) and "foundational blackness" (50). Chapter 1 ("Foundational Blackness and the Racial State of Expendability") outlines these concepts: the former conceptualizes US settler-colonialism as an "existential life devaluation, a perpetual susceptibility to obliteration with legal impunity" (44), where race constructs racism to order space and labor relations. The latter concept, inspired by the work of Houston jazz artist Gil Scott-Heron, suggests that "anti-black racism has had an effect on how nonblack minority groups experience oppression" (51), meaning that the black-white binary of racial discourse erases the projection of antiblackness onto nonblack communities of color and the possibilities for political solidarity.

The bulk of the research centers on a lengthy reconstruction of racial violence during Baytown and Houston's economic boom cycles. The second ("Black Gold and Brown Bodies: Early Baytown") and third ("Subjectivities Chopped and Screwed: Neoliberalism and Its Aftermath") chapters are the strongest in terms of archival research, and Márquez convincingly maps the oral and archival memory of racial segregation of black and brown communities during the oil industry boom of the early twentieth century and the new Latino/a migration wave of the 1960s as a result of neoliberal economies. In particular, Márquez provides a strong link between the terrorist acts of the Ku Klux Klan and Baytown's contemporary cases of police brutality, emphasizing the role of the KKK in the early twentieth century as an "ad hoc police force" (113), and later the Baytown enforcement campaigns against black and brown youth gangs as mechanisms to "control public spaces in industrial cities" (112). For Márquez, the creation of African American and Latino/a spaces for community support (e.g., workers' housing, schools, leisure spaces) parallels the rise of jazz music and hip-hop as cultural forms produced to engage and heal the alienation and criminalization of their black and brown bodies. Using hip-hop lyrics as memory artifacts, chapter 3 is the most unique section in terms of methodology; it reveals the iconography of black and brown hip-hop as hybrid counterexpressions to racial violence and surveillance.

If the first two chapters of the book are the strongest in terms of methodology and chronological scope, the fourth chapter ("Rodney King en Español: Baytown's Activist Awakening") and the conclusion ("Moral Witnesses and Mother 'Hoods") are the

weakest parts of *Black-Brown Solidarity*. Throughout the book, Márquez underlines the role of the murder of Luis Alfonso Torres—a Mexican immigrant beaten to death at the hands of Baytown police officers in 2012—in producing an "activist awakening" (28) in Baytown. However, in contrast to the powerful initial chapters, the findings of Márquez in this section feel limited; the reconstruction of the civil protests sparked by the case through newspaper clippings, public statements by the police administrators, and secondhand accounts places too much weight on a singular case of police brutality. Márquez analyzes other police brutality incidents with Latino victims (one in 1978 and another in 1998), but his attempts at understanding the Torres murder case as a breaking point for the community clashes with Marquez's own stated understanding of historical continuity.

Despite the density of sources and archival research, more traditionally minded historians will find the book frustrating, as Márquez, at times, reaches broad arguments using sources and documents without providing their value or social context. Similarly, oral historians will question the lack of detail regarding the number of oral interviews and the length of the entire research project. Another shortcoming is the brevity of the conclusion, covering both a summary of the book's theses and a small coda to the role that women of color played in the history and activism of Baytown. Márquez addresses the gap in the gender discussion of the book ("We must crave critique in order to progress," p. 205), but it is clear that the included brief personal vignettes of his relationships with the women in his family contain valuable ideas that warranted a full chapter. Despite these minor criticisms, it is difficult to deny the ambitious methodological and theoretical scope of *Black-Brown Solidarity*, a nuanced and much needed case study that will become an essential reading in an emergent field.

Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City

by Sonia Song-Ha Lee
University of North Carolina Press. 2014.
352 pages. paper $27.95. e-book $19.99.
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REVIEWED BY AURA S. JIRAU

Sonia Song-Ha Lee's *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement* studies collaborations between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York City in the 1950s through