Corazón de Dixie

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Acknowledgments

“Dear Martie,” wrote my grandmother Beverly in 1945. She was visiting Tijuana with a friend and sent this photo (fig. 37) as a postcard to my grandfather Martin, then her boyfriend, who was stationed on an army base in Las Vegas. “Well here we are in dear old Mexico, what a crazy time we are having. So sorry you can’t be with us. It’s so different down here.”

Grandma, of course, was right: both then and now, a lot was “so different” across borders of space, race, and power in the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. In 1945, Grandma Bev was just a year out of Roosevelt High School, where she had attended class in Los Angeles’s heavily Mexican Boyle Heights neighborhood. But within a decade, she would be living in a white working-class suburb in the San Fernando Valley, where my dad’s elementary school class pictures show that for the first several years, nearly all of his classmates were white. Immigrants and Americans of European descent and those of Mexican descent were well on the road to “difference” in my hometown of Los Angeles and across the Southwest, in matters of housing, education, and indeed the two groups’ locations in the cultural and spatial geographies of race.

My desire to understand why and how this came to be has motivated my learning and scholarship in U.S. and Latin American history, ultimately piquing my interest in a region, the U.S. South, whose racial regimes have sometimes functioned differently. Grandma Bev’s postcard thus highlights the most important blessings that have graced my career and this book: the love and rootedness of family and friends; the unimaginably good education I have received thanks to the social mobility that my families enjoyed on the white side of “difference”; and the generosity of colleagues, mentors, and students, most from the other side of the borderlands’ color line, who have trusted my interest in immigrants’ rights and Mexican American history, supported me and my work, and generously educated me with their perspectives and life experiences. I offer this book to my family, teachers, mentors, colleagues, and students as just one piece of my effort to make good on the investments and trust they have placed in me.

When I left Los Angeles for my freshman year of college, I had a mediocre grasp of the Spanish language, the beginnings of an elite education, and little knowledge of Latin America or the Latino communities that had thrived all around me throughout my youth. Mentors in immigrants’ rights, social services, and academia helped me grow beyond that younger self. Thank you for trusting and investing in me, Sandra Serrano Sewell, Juan Hernández, Omar de la Torre, and Yvonne Mariajimenez. As an undergraduate student, I was fortunate to join Yale’s Ethnicity, Race, and Migration program and to benefit from the stimulation and support of Alicia Schmidt Camacho.
and Patricia Pessar. Patricia’s death in 2012 saddened me not just because of our personal connection but because I and the world still had so much more to learn from her. Graduate mentors Seth Fein, Glenda Gilmore, and especially Gil Joseph and Steve Pitti taught me how to be a historian, shaped this project from its inception, and supported me emotionally as I navigated academia. A personally meaningful career has been one of my life’s greatest gifts, and for that, my debt to all of you can never be repaid.

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The pages of this book are what they are because busy people took the time to read them and tell me what was missing, weak, or wrong. In addition to the graduate school friends named above, thank you for your feedback, José Alamillo, Luis Alvarez, Stephen Aron, Gabriela Arredondo, Carlos Blanton, Al Camarillo, Ernesto

Figure 37 Photo postcard of the author’s grandmother, Beverly Millman (later Weise) (left), in Tijuana with friend, 1945. Inscription on the back reads, “Dear Martie, Well here we are in dear old Mexico, what a crazy time we are having. So sorry you can’t be with us. It’s so different down here.” Courtesy of Daniel Weise.
Chávez, Marisela Chávez, Cindy I-Feng Chen, N. D. B. Connolly, Bill Deverell, John Mack Faragher, Lynn Fujiwara, Matt García, David Gutiérrez, Cindy Hahamovitch, Tom Hanchett, Nancy Hewitt, Michael Innis-Jiménez, Matthew Lassiter, Eileen Luhr, Bethany Moreton, Suzanne Oboler, Lorena Oropeza, Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Yuridia Ramírez, Marc Rodriguez, Vicki Ruiz, Leo Spitzer, Jessica Vasquez, Pamela Voelkel, Louis Warren, and Richard White. Three brilliant thinkers who are themselves actors in this story, Richard Enriquez, Javier González, and Wayne Hurder, kindly subjected my chapters to the “ring-true test” and let me know where they did not pass. I am also grateful for helpful support and advice from and conversations with Benny Andres, Carl Brasseaux, Gabriela González, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, Natalia Molina, Jocelyn Olcott, George Sánchez, Heather Smith, Jamie Winders, Elliot Young, and the audiences at presentations I had the opportunity to deliver at the University of Alabama, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Brown University, Cornell University, Freedom University Georgia, the University of California at Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, the University of Georgia, and the University of Paris—Diderot. In addition to my graduate mentors, a few brave souls provided feedback on the entire draft manuscript. For your utter generosity, thank you Sarah Deutsch, Jerry González, Laurie Green, Chuck Grench, Gerardo Licón, Gustavo Licón, Mary Odem, Paul Ortiz, Isabela Seong Leong Quintana, Matthew Rosenbaum, Karen Weise, Nan Woodruff, and an anonymous peer reviewer. I hope that you all see your intellectual imprints on these pages, because they are certainly there.

A particular joy of border-crossing work is that I have gotten to know scholars in many different academic subfields within U.S. and Latin American history, global migration studies, and the social sciences. I particularly value the opportunity that the Chicano/Latino studies community has given me to grow, write, teach, and act within its fold. Forty years ago when young scholars first proposed to study the histories of Mexicans in the United States, they were forced to matriculate into Latin American history programs because the field of U.S. history did not see a place for them. No sooner did Chicano Studies find a small bit of solid ground in a white-dominated academy than it created a place for me, a white woman, in its ranks. Because I am often asked, it is worth stating publicly that despite the competitiveness of academia, I have never once felt identity politics used against me. I have tried my best to reciprocate by respecting this field’s role as not only an intellectual project but also one of the few spaces in the academy where people of color can seek mentorship and camaraderie. I have sometimes fallen short in my attempts to navigate these waters, yet my colleagues in Chicano/Latino Studies have been generous and forgiving. I thank them all for their passionate and expansive approach to this work, for creating this academic field, and for opening a space for me within it.

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Acknowledgments
Acknowledgments

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Even more obviously, the credit for oral history research does not accrue to a solitary historian. Gustavo Arévalo, Geraldine Davidson, and Richard Enriquez helped me make key contacts for my interviews. And dozens of people, white, black, Mexicano, and Latino, were willing to share their lives with me on tape and let me scan their photos and personal papers. Many of the most important stories in this book would have been impossible to recount if not for their generosity. Some of their memories, like living as a black man under segregation or risking one’s life to cross the border, were extremely painful to revisit. I will be sharing this book with them and only hope they conclude that their time with me was well spent.

The decade of research compiled in Corazón de Dixie enters the world through the diligence of Chuck Grench and the amazing staff at the University of North Carolina Press, whose good reputation among authors turns out to be well deserved. Chuck insisted I prioritize quality over speed and then waited patiently each time I took his advice. He and the rest of the staff, particularly Mary Caviness, Heidi Perov, and Iza Wojciechowska, have walked this first-time author through the publication process with great care and attention.

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