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Book Review: Voices from the Nueva Frontera: Latino Immigration in Dalton, Georgia

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BOOK REVIEWS

Voices from the Nueva Frontera: Latino Immigration in Dalton, Georgia. Edited by Donald E. Davis, Thomas M. Deaton, David P. Boyle and Jo-Anne Schick. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009. 190 pages. ISBN 978-1-57233-653-7. \$37.00.

This is a unique and welcome book as – with one of the highest concentrations of Latino workers in the United States – the area surrounding the carpet-manufacturing city of Dalton, Georgia can be viewed as a window through which scholars, government officials and others from throughout the South can see how Latino immigrant workers and their families adjust to, and assimilate into American work and cultural communities.

Divided into four topical areas – Economics, Culture, Education and [Social] Problems – contributors offer their scholarly expertise, observations, published data, and transcripts from interviews with more than 100 individuals to explore conditions that attract and retain Latino immigrants to the area. After discussing their impact on the local labor, housing and small business markets, the authors relate how Latino culture “has taken root” through: observance of religious festivals and social and cultural events; participation in soccer competition; the establishment of Latino newspapers, and radio and television stations; and, as recipient of services provided by the local Catholic church and local faith-based organizations.

Readers will find chapters devoted to education particularly useful. With fifty percent of the local population being Latino, Dalton’s schools enroll more than 3,700 Latino students and employ thirty-eight ESOL teachers. “White flight,” pedagogical problems and standardized test scores are discussed. Then, informed by the fact that most of the contributors are on the faculty of nearby Dalton State College, the authors provide a good discussion of the impact of Latino students and their experience on that college’s predominately Anglo student body, including: race-related problems in the classroom; whether Latino culture devalues higher education; and, the impact of increasing Latino enrollment on the student and academic programming.

The final chapters explore a variety of social challenges confronting the local community. For medical and social work practitioners, it’s the language barrier that’s the most challenging problem; most healthcare employees speak only English while many Latino immigrants speak only Spanish. Then, compounding this problem is the fact that the delivery model for medical care and social services is complicated by the present shift from federal control to another model funded and delivered by state and local government. A somewhat disappointing finding is that – even though the higher pay and dependable employment cycles of the carpet mills offer are offering Latinos social stability – police are having to deal with increased property and gang-related crime.

Highly recommended for public and academic libraries serving communities with a growing Latino population. The inclusion of an interview and photograph at the end of each chapter of a local Latino citizen discussing their personal experience regarding the topic discussed adds a context seldom seen in academic studies of this nature.

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