

Seminar “Environment, Cities and Cultures”

**Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America – A.K. Sandoval-Strausz**

In his article *Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America*, published in *The Journal of American History* in 2014, A.K. Sandoval-Strausz outlines the effects that the immigration of Latinos into U.S.-American cities has had on both the U.S. and the respective home countries in Latin America. He appeals to the field of urban history, that is still largely focused on domestic analyses, to extend their future analyses of U.S. cities onto a transnational context and goes even further by arguing that, in fact, “the time has come for the next urban history” (805). While doing so he does not, however, dismiss the work or methods of previous scholars in the field, but praises them for what they have achieved in their time thus embedding his thesis within in the context of urban history drawing on the works of various scholars from Kenneth Jackson and Arnold Hirsch to the notion of global cities by sociologist Saskia Sassen.

In order to illustrate how Latino immigration saved U.S. cities from depopulation and decay he uses the example of Oak Cliff, a neighbourhood in Dallas. He provides not only an extensive overview of the neighbourhood’s historical development (cf 808-812) including factors such as race-based segregation and desegregation, but at the same time illustrates the economic conditions in, in this case, Mexican rural areas that eventually led to a number of Mexicans immigrating to the U.S.. By constantly providing extensive information on both the home countries as well as the target country of the migrating population, perhaps most interestingly by explaining the so-called “Dos por Uno” programme, Sandoval illustrates very well how urban historiography can and should make a paradigmatic shift towards a transnational context. The cooperation between Mexican migrants living and working in the U.S. and the Mexican authorities had a tremendous impact on social and economic conditions in rural Mexico. The positive effects that Latin immigration had on the Dallas neighbourhood – in the shape of on the one hand revitalising otherwise deserted streets by opening small businesses that stood in contrast to the American trend towards big suburban malls but also on the other hand a much lower crime rate in those neighbourhoods – are demonstrated very well and are

portrayed as a result of distinct cultural, urbanistic practices and the Latino way of organising social space. Sandoval asserts that these urbanization processes are part of a pan-American urban system and should be viewed as such in order to generate a thorough and complete historiography: "Interpreting this process in a hemispheric context allows us to decenter the United States by recognizing Latino urbanization as a transnational process that in most respects began in Latin America and only gradually came to involve U.S. cities." (826)

Last but certainly not least, Sandoval provides a new, refreshing, and very much needed view on immigrants in general and Latino immigrants in particular that stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing narrative of the lazy, criminal immigrant demonized by politicians' rhetoric and the general anti-immigration sentiment supported by the media. All in all, Sandoval's article can therefore be seen as a crucial contribution to the future of urban history and a long overdue recognition and appreciation of the role that immigrants play and always have played in shaping and writing a uniquely American history.