

# UC Santa Barbara

## Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies

### Title

Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr., Becoming Mexipino: Multiethnic Identities and Communities in San Diego

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81b8z5mr>

### Journal

Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies, 1(1)

### Author

Schlund-Vials, Cathy J.

### Publication Date

2014

### DOI

10.5070/C811021388

### Copyright Information

Copyright 2014 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## Review

**RUDY P. GUEVARRA, JR.** *Becoming Mexipino: Multiethnic Identities and Communities in San Diego*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012. xii + 239 pages. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9780813552842. \$72.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780813552835. Also available in eBook.

In “The Intimacies of Four Continents” (2006), cultural critic Lisa Lowe eloquently considers the geopolitical dimensions of “spatial proximity” and “adjacent connection” vis-à-vis the multivalent concept of “intimacy.” Notwithstanding its lexical resonance with “romantic or sexual relations, familiarity, or domesticity,” Lowe strategically uses “intimacy” via a set of “political economic logics” to chart the imbricated and contested movements of bodies, ideas, and capital throughout nations, across continents, and over oceans. Such logics necessarily bring together Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas; they are analogously emblemized by the historical, economic, and political importance of “native, mixed, and creole peoples” (192). Lowe’s multipart evaluation of geographic proximity, demographic connection, racialized politics, and complex social formations presages the types of critical inquiries at the forefront of Rudy Guevarra, Jr.’s recently published *Becoming Mexipino: Multiethnic Identities and Communities in San Diego* (2012).

If central to Lowe’s argument is a nuanced analysis of the “intimacy of four continents,” then at stake in Guevarra’s project is an analogously sophisticated examination of the intimacy of three nations (Mexico, the Philippines, and the United States) and two hemispheres (Eastern and Western). Divided into five body chapters, with an introduction and epilogue, *Becoming Mexipino* is both an account of two ethnic groups (Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans) and a layered story about San Diego. As Guevarra succinctly summarizes, *Becoming Mexipino* is “a socio-historical interpretation of two ethnic groups . . . whose paths led them to San Diego, California, from 1903 to 1965” (7). The setting for Guevarra’s study accretes further meaning when set adjacent to the dominant trend in ethnic studies in terms of site. To clarify, notwithstanding its significance as an immigrant metropole, San Diego has yet to receive the serious attention afforded its Southern California counterpart, Los Angeles. Even so, Guevarra’s contention that Mexican and Filipino immigrants functioned as transnational actors who consistently negotiated a shifting socioeconomic imaginary would be enhanced via a concentrated definition of “transnational” and expanded consideration or brief acknowledgement of other “glocal” cities and borderland locales (e.g. on the West Coast and in the Southwest). Nevertheless, Guevarra’s *Becoming Mexipino* literally and productively treads new ground with regard to U.S. immigration history and interethnic location.

In many ways an “intimate” intergenerational account of these two groups, *Becoming Mexipino* explores “how the shared experiences of Mexicans and Filipinos in San Diego forged a distinct identity over several generations from two ethnicities that share overlapping histories, a similar culture, and lived experiences” while attending to the complexities of a relationship “forged through movements of both cooperation and disagreement” (6). Guevarra deftly navigates the interconnected terrains of multiracial “cooperation and disagreement” via a heretofore under-examined record of migration, interethnic exchange, community building, and activism. A truly original endeavor, Guevarra’s historical work is, as expected, most evident in the archive, which brings together interviews, oral histories, state documents, city plans, photographs, and community accounts. This diverse archive foregrounds a larger narrative of racialized migration and domestic racial formation that consistently and capaciously considers the dizzying role of trade, imperialism, labor, segregation, and activism in the making of distinctly mixed race subjectivities.

To be sure, this reading of Guevarra's project is substantiated from the outset and remains a constant throughout *Becoming Mexipino*. The introduction, which provides a clear historical overview, commences with a brief account of a March 15, 2008 featherweight boxing match between Manny Pacquiao (of the Philippines) and Juan Marquez (of Mexico), converging on the performance of national anthems. Whereas a Filipina singer represented the Philippines and a Mexicano performed on behalf of Mexico, the U.S. anthem was sung by Jasmine Villegas, a fourteen-year-old "multiethnic Filipina-Mexican, or Mexipina" (1). This anecdote, which underscores the ways in which citizenship is fixed to affective and cultural modes of belonging, sets the stage for convergent historical encounters and political connections between Mexican and Filipino Americans. As Guevarra rightly reminds his readers, both groups shared cultural affinities that included language and religion; they were forged in the afterglow of Spanish imperialism and U.S. neocolonialism; and they struggled with *de jure* discrimination in the form of socioeconomic discrimination. Even with these coherences, Guevarra does not present an account of interchangeable identities. To clarify, his project is largely concerned with the complex and at times contradictory notion of "*becoming Mexipino*," which on the one hand is predicated on a mixed-race identity forged from both Mexican and Filipino experiences. On the other hand, such a rubric of becoming maintains a distinctly liminal sensibility and subjectivity.

Such fluidity corresponds to Guevarra's title which tactically pairs transformative verb to alchemical subject. Indeed, "to become" suggests not only "beginning to be"; it simultaneously encapsulates a sense of "growing to be" or "turning into" (as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*). This comparative focus—which establishes the distinct but often connective conditions that brought Mexicans and Filipinos to San Diego and considers their respective social histories "in city"—persists throughout *Becoming Mexipino*. For example, Chapter One, titled "Immigration to a Rising Metropolis," persuasively maintains that Mexican and Filipino migration to the United States was marked by the possibility of opportunity and the reality of racialized limitation; it was likewise redolent of discrete racial formations that involved transnational engagements (in the case of Mexican immigrants) and transpacific encounters (with regard to Filipino migrants). Guevarra further distinguishes the fortune of both groups via the U.S. Navy, which recruited heavily in the Philippines and fostered a direct course to San Diego (a key military site).

This careful distinction between groups, along with the failure of U.S. exceptionalism with regard to racialized discrimination, operates as the central focus of Chapter Two, hauntingly named, "The Devil Comes to San Diego: Race and Spatial Politics." Focused on the formation of segregated communities, "The Devil Comes to San Diego" examines the convergence of communities of color (including African Americans, other Asian Americans, and white ethnics). Notwithstanding such separatist logics, evident in the intersection of labor, xenophobia, and racism, Guevarra perceptively charts the makings—or "becomings"—of a mixed community. This work presages the emphases in Chapter Three ("Survival and Belonging: Civil Rights, Social Organizations, and Youth Cultures") which shifts its attention to how these communities created alternative sites of citizenship (e.g. aid associations, social clubs, and rock-and-roll bands) which would later give rise to larger social movements explored in Chapter Four ("Race and Labor Activism in San Diego"). Even with such convergences, as Guevarra carefully notes, competing interests and agendas complicate a master narrative of ethnoracial collaboration.

Situated against this complex matrix of individual communities and interconnected relationships, wherein both Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans *became* more economically, socially, and politically established, Guevarra concludes his study with the articulation of a distinct reading of "Mexipino." Accordingly, Chapter Five ("Filipino-Mexican Couples and the Forging of a Mexipino Identity") returns to intimate imaginaries in its consideration of interracial marriage and

mixed race identity. This “mixed race” work presages Guevarra’s closing argument in the book’s epilogue, wherein the author avers that “racial and ethnic groups have always functioned in relation to each other, not as separate entities” (170). By no means a teleological assertion of intergenerational mixture, *Becoming Mexipino* concludes with the challenges faced by self-identified Mexipinos with regard to interactions with newly arrived Filipino and Mexican immigrant groups that interrogated claims of cultural authenticity.

In so doing, Guevarra returns to the notion of “becoming” that in many ways guides the types of interpretive analyses at play in the larger project; this fluidity makes clear the extent to which present-day Mexipino subjectivity remains by no means fixed but is instead flexibly in flux. Unquestionably, it is Guevarra’s overall emphasis on the “relational” and liminal—alongside the insistence that each group must be considered separately, collectively, and communally—that brings to light the analytical stakes of critical mixed race studies, which in similar fashion labors to theorize how particular bodies are, by way of history and intimacy, “brought into being.” Indeed, *Becoming Mexipino* is, in the end, a smart and persuasive evaluation of how space, place, and race remain interrelated and interconnected.

Cathy J. Schlund-Vials

*University of Connecticut*

#### **WORKS CITED**

Lowe, Lisa. “The Intimacies of Four Continents.” In *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, edited by Ann Laura Stoler. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 191–212.