

Application Essay
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My research on the music of the Mexican immigrant community in Atlanta was challenging for one of the primary reasons that I found my topic interesting: it is a new and relatively unstudied field. All of the components of my topic—popular music, complex notions of identity, Mexican immigration, and the city of Atlanta—necessitated the use primary sources and varied types of media. There are no existing studies on Latino music in Atlanta, and very few on Latinos in the South in general. Mexican immigrants, many of whom are illegal, produce few written records on their experiences. Latino music was until recently largely ignored by mainstream popular culture. And Atlanta, which has only within the last twenty years become home to large numbers of Mexican immigrants, is traditionally viewed within a black-white framework, with little room for other ethnicities. As a result of these challenges in the research process, my first step was to find secondary sources that provided a theoretical background, analyzed similar case studies, or focused on culture and identity. I found several fascinating sources using GIL, such as Frances Aparicio's *Musical Migrations* and David Maciel's *Culture across Borders*. Using books and articles I found on Galileo in journals like *Social Science Quarterly* and the *Journal of Cultural Geography* I was able to piece together a good theoretical framework for how immigrants, specifically Mexican immigrants, have coped with the struggles of assimilation using various cultural forms.

About halfway through my research process a new book was published titled *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place* that was one of the first studies on immigration to the South. Although the UGA library did not have a copy of the book at that time, I obtained one through an interlibrary loan, and using its bibliography found

several more sources in both journals and books. These sources helped me understand the unique urban geography of the Southeast, but few dealt with the culture of the Atlantan immigrant community, and all of them lumped 'Hispanic' immigrants together as a group, without differentiating among the different nationalities and regional identities within that demographic. Also, none of the studies were historically focused, and so did not place particular importance on how the Mexican community, or the broader Latino community, changed over time.

I was able to get a clearer picture of the demographics of the Latino community using the US Census collections in the UGA library. The CD's with the long form data for 1980, 1990, and 2000 provided me with the specific numbers of Hispanic immigrants of all different nationalities in every Atlanta community. Using that information, I created an Excel spreadsheet with the percentages of all the different minority groups and the percent change during each of the ten-year periods for ten different parts of Atlanta. I could then clearly see the geographic and temporal distribution of Latino immigrants in the region, and understand how the community had changed in its demographic composition. I also began to examine back issues of music industry publications, such as the *Broadcasting Yearbook* and *American Radio*, to see how Spanish-language radio stations changed in format and popularity as the demographics of the population changed.

To analyze how the Latino population actively constructed notions of identity, however, I needed more than business periodicals and census data. I first tried to turn to the music itself, but quickly learned that there were limitations both to the accessibility of that information and to how much you could conclude from it. The music of recent immigrants is very far removed from the mainstream, so there is little record of what

songs were popular in the past. Additionally, the analysis of the specific songs can generate many false conclusions about identity. For instance, simply because many people listened to a song about the illicit drug trade does not necessarily mean they were engaged in it. More helpful to my research were secondary sources on regional Mexican music, examples of its various styles, and newspapers that advertised and discussed the different genres in Atlanta.

Using the index to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* I found many articles demonstrating the mainstream response to the rise in Hispanic immigration and the corresponding presence of Latino music and culture. The period from the 1980's to 2000 is not online, so I turned to the microfilm collection to find the necessary information. The most useful source in my research was also on microfilm in the UGA library: the newspaper *Mundo Hispánico*, an Atlanta Spanish-language publication founded in 1979. The paper had a regular listing of events, advertisements by all of the local dance clubs and restaurants with live music, concert reviews, and articles on major events in the Latino community. Because it existed throughout the rapid rise in immigration, *Mundo Hispánico* allowed me to trace the development of the Atlanta music scene. I discovered how the types of music at the largest venues changed and expanded over time, what demographics the early radio stations tried to cater to, which clubs went out of business and why, and when big-name Latino pop stars started coming to Atlanta. The newspaper was also an active player in promoting a unified 'Latino identity.' While its ads featured regional Mexican bands, its headlines advertised a pan-Hispanic culture. Overall, it provided a fascinating portrait of both what Latino immigrants were listening to and how they struggled to unify as a community.

There are many questions revealed by my research that still remain to be answered. Perhaps most important are what Atlanta as a city should do to facilitate the assimilation of its new Latino population and what comparisons can be drawn between Atlanta and the rest of the Southeast. Additionally, the rate of immigration has stayed high, and the continued flow of people into the city will undoubtedly cause further changes in culture and society. My research is simply a small, initial step in understanding a complex and ongoing process.