



**Rodolfo Rosales.** *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. x + 236 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-77103-1; \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-77102-4.



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## Submerging Below the Obvious

In 1969 political strategist Kevin Phillips popularized the term “Sunbelt,” a vaguely defined area, to identify a new constituency for the Republican Party.[1] As the term became somewhat of a cliché, historians examined the designation and refined its meaning. Historian Carl Abbott defined the Sunbelt as a “pair of regions oriented toward the southeastern and southwestern corners of the United States that have shared similarities of economic development and demographic changes since the 1940s.”[2] The changes to which Abbott refers include those in the political realm. Following World War II, municipal reform came to “Sunbelt cities” such as Austin, Houston, Phoenix, and San Antonio, resulting in new charters. Promoted by organized business groups, this reform sought to create city governments that were small, efficient, and committed to orderly growth. These cities, along with Albuquerque and San Jose, also formed committees to recruit and fund supportive council candidates. By the early 1980s many of these cities, some under federal pressure, adopted council-district systems that provided greater political representation for minorities. “The returns are not yet in,” wrote historian Amy Bridges in 1990 “on what increased representation will

mean for the styles and content of Southwestern city politics.”[3] Rodolfo Rosales, an Associate Professor of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Texas at San Antonio, answers this question in *The Illusion of Inclusion*.

Rosales places San Antonio in this Sunbelt context as a city that experienced incredible growth and economic change following World War II. When San Antonio’s long-ruling political machine failed to provide the government that business wanted, the local Anglo business community organized a slating group called the Good Government League (GGL) to select and endorse pro-business candidates for the city council. They successfully gained control of city hall by 1955. The GGL then sought to make the city more attractive to business and successfully transformed San Antonio into a “prototype Sunbelt city featuring a new council-manager government, a liberal annexation policy, and a well developed service economy” (p. 42).

Although not intended to do so, this municipal reform provided an opportunity for the Chicano community to participate in the governance of San Antonio. Previously excluded from politics, the growing Chicano mid-

dle class emerged as a visible political force in the more open political environment created by reform. By 1975, in large part through the voting power of the Chicano community, the dominance of the GGL ended. San Antonio's adoption of the district system in 1977 yielded greater opportunity for political representation when the Chicano community gained five of ten council seats. This new system gave the Chicano community individual political representation for the first time in the century. In 1981 San Antonio elected the first Chicano mayor of a major U.S. city: Henry Cisneros. By 1999, Chicanas or Chicanos held six out of ten city council seats.

On the face of these facts, it would seem that the Chicano community of San Antonio was successful in gaining a seat at the political table, that inclusion had finally been achieved. However, as his title indicates, Rosales looks beneath the surface to see what was accomplished at what cost and to what extent the political system adapted and coopted the Chicano community. Rosales was motivated to examine these issues after witnessing the continued social and economic exclusion of "major sectors of San Antonio's Chicana and Chicano working class and poor" (p. 1).

Rosales writes a layered book. On one level, this book is about urban electoral politics in San Antonio and the critical role of the Chicano community in it. He begins his chronological narrative with the defeat of the political machine and carries it through the mayoral election of 1991. His primary focus is on the Chicano middle class, that element of the Chicano community that was the most active in the urban political arena and in a position to push for change. On a broader level, the book is about "the limitations and potential that a community faces in our very complex urban society" (p. 2). Rosales describes the challenges for communities to bring effective change in a pro-business political environment and market economy, elements of the Sunbelt paradigm.

In choosing the title of his book, "The Illusion of Inclusion," Rosales acknowledges that San Antonio's political system has changed to allow participation by previously excluded groups. But what is the practical result? Do the institutional rules of participation and the pro-business urban political economy permit a community to mobilize for its own interest? Rosales asks, "Is this political prominence simply an accommodation of the Chicano middle class by the Anglo business community to a political process where the political and economic priorities have already been set?" (p. 36). He concludes that the district system, which the Chicano com-

munity successfully promoted and that enabled direct Chicano representation, weakened the influence of parties and community-based organizations and strengthened individual politicians. The district system accompanied a shift from organizational agenda politics to personal agenda politics. An organizational agenda can mobilize a community because there is a direct connection to that community. The result is that issues are broad and community-based. With personal agendas, connection to a community is coincidental. Where personal agendas dominate, challenges to the dominant priorities are lacking and consensus prevails, thus favoring the business community.

There are several aspects to the book's title. One is the dilemma the Chicano community faced of choosing whether to participate in established political groups or to develop an independent political base. Another is that the price for obtaining political inclusion was to abandon the "radicalized community issues" that the Chicano community used to challenge the existing political system. A third aspect is that contemporary electoral politics is oriented to the middle class, and not to the larger Chicano community. A related fourth aspect is that the current politics of individualism has deprived San Antonio's various communities of a means of challenging the continuing business domination of city government.

The subtitle of the book, "The Untold Political Story of San Antonio" reflects another aim of the book. It looks at how the Chicano community has been excluded from the political and urban history of San Antonio, especially in the discussion of San Antonio as a Sunbelt city. Several studies have described the broader political and economic context of San Antonio, yet many overlooked the role of the Chicano community, until the election of Henry Cisneros. Even then the Chicano community was not closely examined. Rosales broadens the picture by documenting what the Chicano community was doing to confront exclusion. He assembled this history using private papers, newspaper reports, and personal interviews with key participants.

Following the introductory chapter, which includes details of the pre-war political activity of San Antonio's Chicano middle class, and another on the methodological framework, the book is divided into three chronological sections. The "Partisan Era" contains two chapters that examine San Antonio's municipal reform, the role of the Chicano community in bringing this reform, and the attempts of the Chicano community to influence the GGL. The second section, "A Period of Transi-

tion", also two chapters long, looks at how a Civil Rights-oriented sector of the Chicano middle class formed the Bexar County Democratic Coalition and challenged the GGL, the demise of this coalition, and how the Chicano Movement influenced a new generation of leaders that helped establish the council-district system. The concluding section, "Political Pluralism and Its Consequences", has three chapters. It looks at how the changing political rules of the new system impacted Chicano politics from 1977 to 1985, and closely examines the effectiveness and style of Henry Cisneros (and provides an illuminating contrast with the outspoken Chicano councilman Bernardo Eureste). This is followed by a chapter on the role of Chicanas and their influence on the political system, and the concluding chapter, that contains a summary, identifies issues for further study, and provides a final discussion about how a community can enact change in the current economic and political environment. The book also includes photographs of key people and events, an appendix listing the ethnicity of San Antonio mayors and council members from 1951 to 1999, and a comprehensive bibliography.

Throughout the book, Rosales threads the evolution of Chicana political involvement. Although largely invisible in political decision-making in the 1950s and early 1960s, these women recruited supporters and campaigned for Chicano causes. In the later 1960s, Chicanas coordinated legal challenges to San Antonio's at-large system and actively ran for political office. In the 1980s, Chicanas were elected to the city council, and in 1991 Maria Antonietta Berriozabal narrowly lost the mayoral election. Rosales goes beyond description, however: he argues that Chicanas bring a community-based orientation with them to the political process. This orientation, and the resulting politics, comes from the Chicana's gender experience of exclusion and neglect. Rosales emphasizes that these Chicanas get involved in the political process to serve their community and retain a connection to that community's issues, and sometimes they promote these issues at a personal cost. Despite the cynicism implied by his book's title, it is in this analysis that Rosales is hopeful, resisting the urge to conclude that in an era dominated by personal agendas that there is very little possibility for communities to challenge the busi-

ness community's economic and political priorities. His evidence of this trend is anecdotal, based on the case studies of two Chicana leaders: Berriozabal and Rosa Salazar Rosales, activist and former state director of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Both women, he writes, advance an agenda that is "radically opposed" to the current political status quo. Rosales offers this observation as a possibility for true inclusion. Yet this argument, based on a couple of limited examples and requiring further time and study, is probably the weakest portion of the book.

In conclusion, this book succeeds on a number of levels. First, it is an insightful political history of San Antonio and the role of the Chicano community in it. Second, by setting the story in a broader Sunbelt context, Rosales provides a useful framework for understanding Chicano political activity in other Sunbelt places –like Phoenix, which has a smaller Chicano population that exists in the same kind of environment, and needs a more critical examination. In this respect, Rosales builds on the questions and trends identified by Abbott, Bridges, and other "Sunbelt" historians. Rosales's work should help historians better understand the politics of the Sunbelt cities and others that compete for investment and prominence. The book is well written: it presents a lot of ideas, and in that sense it is a dense book, but these ideas are presented clearly. Rosales reflected a long time on these ideas, and his book shows it.

#### Notes

[1]. Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969).

[2]. Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 33.

[3]. Amy Bridges, "Politics and Growth in Sunbelt Cities" in *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region*, ed. Raymond A. Mohl (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 86, 90-91, 96.

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