The fire this time: the battle over racial, regional and religious identities in Dallas, Texas, 1860-1990

Abstract
Focusing on the relationship between African Americans, Mexican Americans, Jews and working class Anglos, this dissertation explores the development of whiteness ideology in Texas. It argues that whiteness in Dallas was a complex construction of racial identity. This ideology was disseminated through the printed media, school curricula, popular songs and political discourse. While identity required not only a European background, but also adherence to a series of ideological assumptions, including belief in welfare capitalism and faith in a republican system of government that ensured rule by elites. Many Mexican Americans and Jews pursued a strategy of claiming a white identity in order to achieve high social standing, but both groups were only partially successful, with the elite Jews and Latinos achieving probationary whiteness based on their economic standing but remaining socially marginalized. Most Jewish residents occupied a higher economic status than Latinos and their efforts to achieve a white identity were more successful. Whiteness was also shaped in part by pre-millennial dispensationalist theology. Dispensationalist theologians such as Cyrus Scofield interpreted the Bible as a prophetic text predicting the end of the world and emphasized a positive role for Jews in causing the Second Coming. This allowed elites to set aside anti-Semitism and accommodate economically important wealthy Jews. Well into the twentieth century, however, Jews would be defined not as fully white, but as closely related cousins. The struggle to construct a regional identity, however, created instability in the city’s leadership. Elites originally depicted Dallas as Southern in order to rationalize slavery and opposition to Reconstruction, but this discouraged Northern investment and the political support of wealthy Northern immigrants to the city. From the 1870s on, Dallas leaders constructed the city as Southwestern, or as part of the Sunbelt, or even culturally Eastern in order to incorporate wealthy non-Southern whites into the ruling class. While whiteness marginalized white workers, Mexican Americans, and blacks, its flexibility allowed wealthy gentile Northerners and Southerners, as well as upper-class Jews, to unite under a common racial banner.
The fire this time: the battle over racial, regional and religious identities in Dallas, Texas, 1860-1990. Focusing on the relationship between African Americans, Mexican Americans, Jews and working class Anglos, this dissertation explores the development of whiteness ideology in Texas. It argues that whiteness in Dallas was a complex construction of racial identity. Many Mexican Americans and Jews pursued a strategy of claiming a white identity in order to achieve high social standing, but both groups were only partially successful, with the elite Jews and Latinos achieving probationary whiteness based on their economic standing but remaining socially marginalized.