ABSTRACT

JOSE LUIS MARTINEZ. Mediating Racial Identity for Profit in a “Newer South”: A Visual Investigation of Physical Billboards to Digital Space. (Under the direction of Dr. Zachary Beare).

Current scholarship surrounding the Southern institution, South of the Border (SOB) often examines the history of early 20th century South Carolina. Largely, the founder, Alan Schafer is examined through disciplines of history, politics, commerce, and his personal impact upon the region as he grew his roadside tourist attraction. My research addresses a gap in current scholarship as to voice an informed perception of Mexican/Latinx identity in the South. Through principles of Visual Rhetoric, Cluster Criticism, Billboard studies, and ethnolinguistic reports of ethnic demographics in the American South, I work to address how stereotypical depictions of Mexican identity are projected and normalized by dominant social groups. Building upon prior scholarship on SOB, I too assert that while Schafer contributed to a more ethnically inclusive South, his largest motivation for doing so was profit and growing his business. Reexamining SOB’s use of billboards is necessary as the stereotypes and mimicking of the Spanish language have been presented as a form of advertising since the 1950s. However, within the last decade, as SOB appears to be on its last legs as a roadside attraction; their stereotypical images and (mis)representation of Mexican Identity in the South has now made its way to digital spaces – further cementing the outdated and offensive likeness of Pedro, the SOB mascot. Analysis concludes that over several decades, a variety of SOB billboards have been produced, although only with slight variations to how the billboards make use of Mexican stereotypes both discursively and non-discursively. Implications of this analysis aim to better voice and represent the often-overlooked perspective of Mexican/Latinx individuals concerning SOB’s cultural impact upon Robeson County SC, consumers, and most recently, any person with an internet connection.